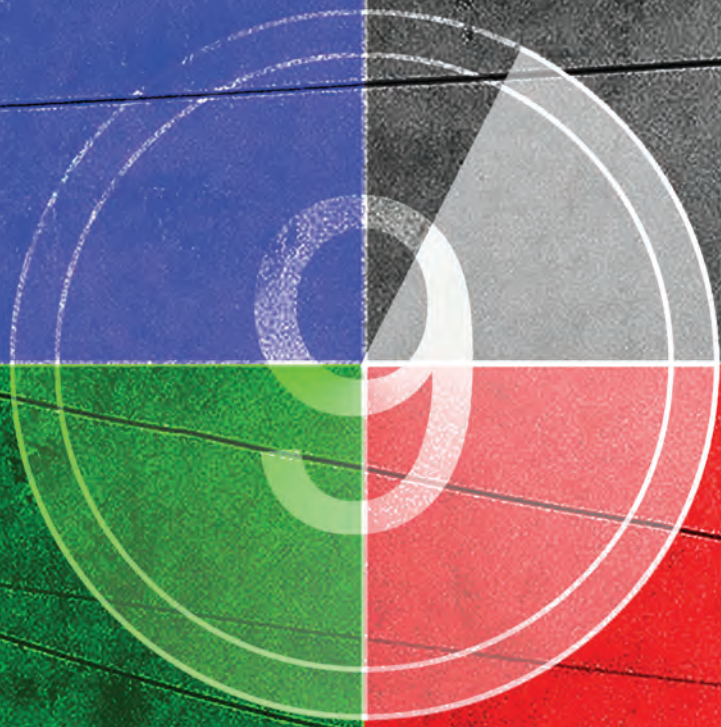


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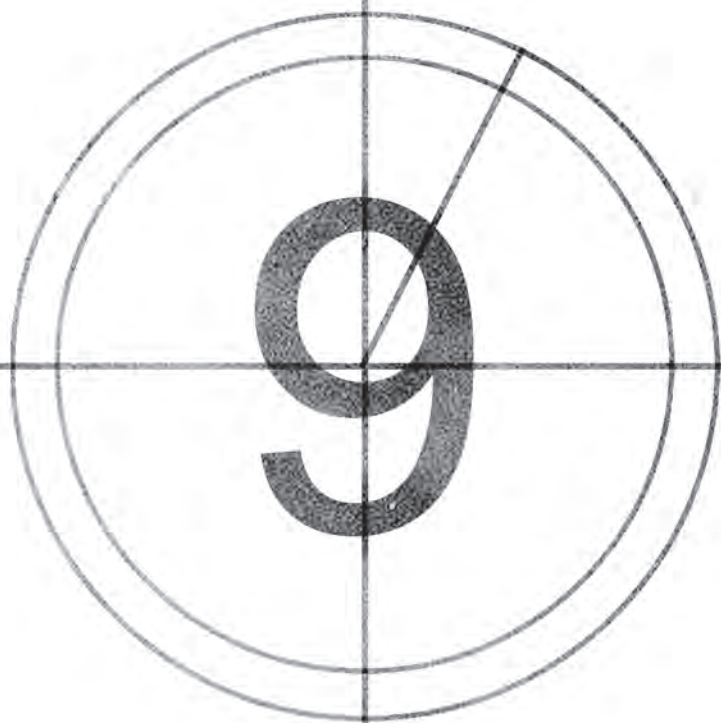


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PROJECTIONS

To project – light, dreams, visions, plans, propositions and prospects.

A projection always involves an incandescent transference, some crossing of a void or darkness to effect luminous landings on a distant surface. Without projections, we would have no cinemas, no city plans, no forecasts, no wagers, no fantasies. Projections convect questions, magnify dreams and illuminate desires.

Sarai Reader 09: Projections translates this imperative to act as a transport of illumination to build an axis of central questions. A handlist of these questions could be:

What does it mean to go back to the drawing board? Which drawing board are we going back to? What makes us want to revisit fundamental questions of how life, space, time, work, power, the ecosystem and society are organised?

Why is it no longer possible or attractive to think of piecemeal reforms or solutions to the general economic and social crises of contemporary capitalism? The failure of capitalism to produce viable visions for tomorrow – combined with the scenarios unfolding within situations like the 'Occupy' Movements all over the world – anchors the urgency with which these questions can be asked today.

What gets transformed when thousands of people gather on the streets? In Delhi, we have witnessed something intangible change in the city ever since thousands of young people began gathering in the wake of the rape and subsequent death of a young woman at the end of 2012. How have these gatherings changed the way people view themselves and each other? Are people seeing each other in a changed light?

What tasks can artistic activity set itself in the 21st century? This would include speculations on the future trajectory of practice in the arts, art education, curation and the possibilities of the drawing of new relationships between art, design, technology, science, philosophy and everyday life. How can exhibitions, museums, public art institutions become sites of an active unfolding of questions, rather than a catalogue of answers and assertions?

What are the great unknowns of our times, the zones of darkness? Not in terms of negativity, but in terms of the fact that we are simply in the dark about a series of questions that confront us.

How effective are visual metaphors for social and political processes? What do we mean when we talk about transparency and opacity, light and darkness, in social and political speech?

The form that the contributions in this book take are varied and come from diverse domains. There are essays, arguments, interviews, photographs, image-text combinations, comics, art-works; each evoking responses to what 'projection' can mean, extending it in myriad dimensions.

Projections operates across two surfaces at once: on the printed page of this book (the ninth and final publication in the *Sarai Reader* series) and within the context of the contemporary art exhibition titled, 'Sarai Reader 09: The Exhibition'. The exhibition and all the processes that arose within it anticipated the book's concerns through an occupation of time, space and attention over a nine-month-long duration at the Devi Art Foundation, Gurgaon.

Since it opened in August 2012, the exhibition has taken the form of a series of unfolding proposals and episodes, gathering incrementally to produce a body of work that signposts shifting co-ordinates of image and thought, mapping a new horizon marked by the intersection of art, sociability, research and commentary. The last section of this book, 'Art as a Place', acts as an echo in print of the many kinds of energies that have animated the exhibition.

Projections is not a catalogue of the exhibition at the Devi Art Foundation. Nor is 'Sarai Reader 09: The Exhibition' a curated illustration of the concepts advanced by the book. Rather, the publication and the exhibition act as adjacent platforms from which new ideas and concepts, discursive as well as aesthetic, set off as travelling companions and find their separate yet occasionally converging itineraries.

This book is a roadmap of that journey.

PROJECTIONS

Editorial Collective
April 2013, Delhi



“LIFE INJECTED WITH LIFE”¹

LOCATING TOLERANCE IN NASREEN MOHAMEDI’S ABSTRACTION

Robin Simpson

*Different levels of depth into paintings
That is what makes life injected with life –
These variations, these unknown depths.*

Nasreen Mohamedi, diary entry,
1 February 1969, Kuwait

*Each line, texture (form) are born of effort,
history and pain.*

Nasreen Mohamedi, diary entry,
20 July 1971, Delhi

Since 2000, there has been renewed interest in Nasreen Mohamedi’s abstract drawings of dense systems of grids, axial trajectories and geometric forms. Produced throughout the 1970s and 80s, these drawings were accompanied by a parallel photographic practice that in part documented Mohamedi’s travels throughout India, Asia and the Arab World. Never intended by the artist to be exhibited, these photographs have since been positioned and examined by recent exhibitions and texts as formal footnotes to her drawing practice. These same texts have emphasised her stylistic and temporal discordance with both Indian and Euro-American art. While many of her contemporaries previously worked to varying degrees with abstract styles, there was by the 1970s a broad shift toward figuration in painting. This move was in part a response to immediate political events. From 1975 to 1977, Indira Gandhi ruled by decree, suspending civil liberties and elections. For some artists, this period, otherwise known as the Emergency, demanded explicit representation. Throughout this highly charged moment, Mohamedi’s style remained unchanged. Comparisons with American minimalist and post-minimalist artists only further discourage political readings of her work, where the multiple strands of involvement by these artists

within the anti-war movement, feminism and labour activism seem to immediately humble Mohamedi’s quiet abstraction.² However, in the same breath, Mohamedi is also cast as an exemplary reference point to examine alternative global modernities; a statement best summarised by her inclusion in the 12th edition of Documenta under the inquisitive rubric: *Modernity?* Whereas, in another case, her work has been corralled under the title of “modest modernism”.³

These approaches do not fully address what is at stake in casting Mohamedi in dialogue or tension with transnational modernism. Instead, emphasis is placed on the artist’s singular style, non-participation and solitude. This combined focus on the formal abstraction of both her work, the insistence on the absence of a clear and situated social referent, and pronouncements of her disciplined production that near on attributions of asceticism, greatly underplay the possibility of identifying political dimensions of any depth within her work. Thus, while the feminist adage ‘The personal is political’ remains implicit, Mohamedi’s work remains relegated to being both peerless and nowhere.

Geeta Kapur has proposed that Mohamedi predicated her abstraction on an act of “self-naughting”, arguing that the artist’s body is referenced in the careful coordination of its very absence. Considering this, I argue that Mohamedi’s work was not simply the measure of metaphysical and phenomenological ruminations. And without refuting these qualities, I believe this reading can be enriched by a more precise examination of her photography and its immediate historical context. I wish to propose that Mohamedi engaged, through these images, in a form of research that took into account the complex web of cultural and ideological pressures present in the sites studied. Underlying my argument is the suggestion that the undeclared figuration of Mohamedi’s abstraction, posited by Kapur, also includes a

plurality of absent bodies in addition to that of the artist. I aim, in effect, to crowd Mohamedi's abstraction.

For this paper, I will focus on a photograph taken by Mohamedi during a visit to the 16th century Mughal city, Fatehpur Sikri. Far from operating in a documentary mode, these photographs closely examine a site of great political import. Taking into account the changing cultural and political valuations of Fatehpur Sikri in post-Independence India, I propose that Mohamedi's photograph offers evidence of her active contemplation of the management of difference and aversion through formal design and discourse – in short, the identification of the circulation, application and spatialisation of modern modes of tolerance.

Early Influences

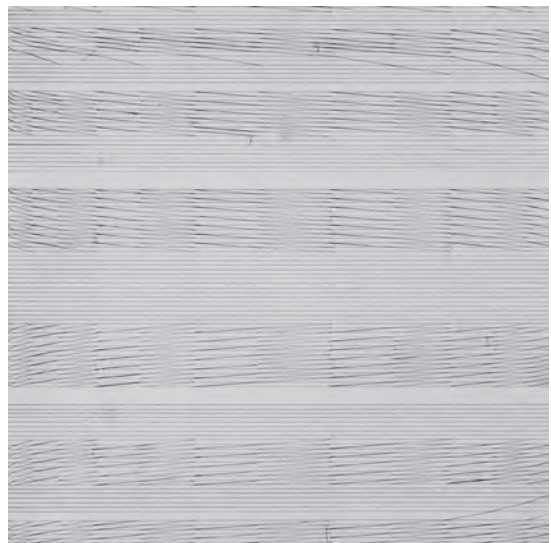
A brief summary of Mohamedi's biography immediately introduces a cosmopolitan trajectory not uncommon for artists of a particular class during the early decades of decolonisation.⁴ Born in Karachi in 1937, she moved to Bombay in 1945 at the age of seven. Between 1954 and 1957, she lived in London, where she studied at St. Martin's School of Art. Upon graduation, she left London and moved to Bahrain, remaining there for roughly a year with her father and brother before returning to India. Arriving in Bombay, she worked out of a studio at the Bhulabhai Memorial Institute, a vibrant cultural hub and regular venue for workshops, salons and performances.⁵ It was here that she befriended former members of the Progressive Artists Group.⁶ In 1961, she mounted her first solo exhibition at the Institute's commercial gallery. That year, she received a scholarship from the French government to study in Paris. In 1964, a year after her return from France, she travelled to the Rajasthan deserts with M.F. Husain, working as a still photographer on his film, *Through the Eyes of a Painter*. In the years following, she also travelled to Iran and Turkey.⁷ In 1972, she joined the Fine Arts Department at the Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda, where she remained until 1988.

From the 1960s to the early 70s, Mohamedi worked with a loose, expressionistic landscape motif, painting in watercolour and ink. Following her arrival in Baroda, her interaction with the drawing support became highly calculated. She abandoned all aspects of representation, trading broad strokes for precise, hard lines in ink and graphite. Working seated on the floor of her home at a low-lying drafting table, she used an array of tools and rules, some custom-made, to measure and trace her graphic systems on small, uniform squares of paper.⁸

'Absolute' Design

In her high-contrast photographs, as with her drawings, Mohamedi excluded the human figure whenever possible. Instead, she photographed domestic spaces, urban infrastructure and industrial machinery. Details of machinery closely scrutinised their design as well as the interrelations between specific mechanisms and materials. Other photographs offered little reference outside of the medium itself, presenting only abstract images that played with extremes of light and darkness.

For Kapur, Mohamedi's photographs reveal "her basic formalism: a sense of 'absolute' design"⁹ that itself is demonstrative of "a minimalist concern with real space and



Untitled, Nasreen Mohamedi

Ink and graphite on paper, 19cm x 19cm, ca. 1970s

IMAGES COURTESY TALWAR GALLERY, NEW YORK / NEW DELHI

the phenomenological presence of the viewer's/walker's body therein".¹⁰ Rebecca M. Brown connects Mohamedi's drawings and photographs via their capacity to present both "a feeling of randomness and a mathematically driven purposiveness".¹¹ Considering Mohamedi's photograph of the Anup Talao pool at Fatehpur Sikri, Ajay Sinha comes to a similar conclusion, using an exclusively formal vocabulary to describe the connections between the photograph and Mohamedi's drawings in general.¹² To another writer, this same photograph amounts to an "idiosyncratically geometrical composition".¹³ And a catalogue essay suggests that her photographs and drawings constitute an extended study of temporal progression.¹⁴

The Anup Talao

Amongst the numerous photographs Mohamedi took, it is her image of the Anup Talao that has been most often reproduced and examined alongside her drawings. As formally dynamic as the image is – the grid of the courtyard, the sharp incision of the narrow waterway, the relegation of the pool to the right corner of the frame and the foregrounding of the courtyard's repetitive elements all make compelling parallels – however Mohamedi's decision to capture this particular historic site in 1970s India demands closer examination. While it is possible to position her precise abstraction as outwardly disengaged and introspective, a consideration of her photography beyond its formal content immediately troubles any strict diagnosis of solipsism or of a humble regional modernism. It is thought that Mohamedi visited this site around 1975,¹⁵ a year marking the commencement of a three-year authoritarian turn in Indian governance. Considering the political import of Mughal architecture, such an event would have certainly agitated a sense of the volatile layers of political, cultural and historical value present in this site.

For Santhi Kavuri-Bauer, Fatehpur Sikri is an ideal case study to examine how monuments are continually produced by the intersection of national and international

cultural policies and political manoeuvres. With reference to Foucault and Lefebvre's writings on the correlations between power and the experience of space, she examines how the discourses of education, heritage and tourism, both colonial and nationalist, shaped and positioned historical sites in India. What the constant discursive repositioning of Fatehpur Sikri demonstrates is that the city persists as a 'lived space'. The term, borrowed from Lefebvre, speaks to the capacity for spaces to not only be reordered through authoritarian measures, but the possibility of civilians to apprehend these changes, even intervene within them, and adopt a broader re-evaluation beyond one particular monument.¹⁶

Between 1570 and 1585, Fatehpur Sikri served as the capital of the Mughal Empire. Although Emperor Akbar's tenure in the city was brief, his rule during this time is characterised by a rapid development of statecraft that included a careful elaboration of social doctrines centered on an ethos of religious tolerance (the *Din-i-ilahi*). Architecture and city planning are thought to mirror these developments by taking into account the constituent religious demographics of the Mughal citizenry. Separate sites were reserved for worship, in addition to marketplaces and symbolic sites for public statecraft. All were carefully distributed in the city's design. It was, in short, a model proto-secular city.¹⁷

Following Independence, the Congress party made strategic references to Mughal architecture to suit their own model of secular governance. These adjustments of the discourse and theatrics of statecraft took on a multitude of forms. There were precisely situated and highly public gestures such as the inaugural unfurling of the Indian flag at the Red Fort in Delhi following Nehru's speech in the Constituent Assembly.¹⁸ Nehru also made explicit reference to Akbar's doctrines of tolerance in his book, *The Discovery of India*. The National Ministry of Education published histories of the Mughal dynasty that drew parallels between mediaeval society and the modern Indian nation state.¹⁹ Tourism, India's involvement with UNESCO and, later in the 1980s,

the designation of Fatehpur Sikri as a World Heritage site all furthered a modernist national project and simultaneously signalled the registration of India within global and western measures of cultural value.²⁰

Mohamedi chose to photograph a highly symbolic site. It was at Anup Talao that Akbar's secular policies were elaborated and discussed. Abu al'Fazl, the emperor's vizier and historian, noted that it was upon the pool's platform that the emperor would meet with Muslim theologians to discuss Islamic law. At other times, it was a site of convivial and improvised ceremony where gifts were distributed to nobles and, on at least one occasion, the surrounding water tank was filled with copper, silver and gold coins.²¹ The story of Tansen, Akbar's preferred court singer and musician, and his exclusive use of the Anup Talao was a well-loved story that continued to circulate through popular culture.

Coeval to Mohamedi's visit, Fatehpur Sikri, and the pool in particular, featured in a rare cinematic dramatisation of Independence and Partition. Released in 1972, M.S. Sathyu's film *Garam Hava* chronicles the struggles of a North Indian Muslim family in Agra immediately following Partition as their status as citizens is progressively eroded. In various scenes dispersed through the film, a pair of young lovers, Amina and Shamshad, sneaks off to explore the nearby Mughal city. Some scenes are playful and flirtatious: they walk through a garden following the geometric patterns laid in the ground, allowing the symmetrical forms to lead them in close proximity and then away again; they peer through decorative

lattices, and call each other's names out and listen to their pronouncements echo within the city's stone chambers. In another scene, they walk in heavy silence outside the city's walls and later liaise in a boat in the nearby river.

The Anup Talao is the point of departure for an extended visual survey of the whole city accompanied by a musical interlude of a devotional song to the Sufi saint Salim Chishti, around whose tomb Akbar built his city. Writing on the film in his book, *Limiting Secularism: The Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film*, Priya Kumar explains that Sathyu's film was the sole one in the decades following Partition to speak to a Muslim minoritarian experience. He concludes, however, that the film "is unable to call into question the construction of Pakistan as the 'other' of Indian nationalism".²²

Yet, Fatehpur Sikri's primacy in Sathyu's film demonstrates how Mughal architecture was not the exclusive property of nation-building discourse. Indeed, the film discloses of a citizen-based consciousness highly sensitive to the dominant narratives and contradictions of modernisation. And this awareness is not located in the decade of the film's release, but, as dramatised in the film, was immediately present at the moment these monuments came to be positioned within a new national framework.

Chandigarh: Communing with Modernity

At this point it is clear, with thanks to Kavuri-Bauer's analysis, that Mughal architecture was just as imbricated in the political policies of post-Independence India as other developmental projects. As noted above, Mohamedi's photographic interests were varied (at times simply unidentifiable) but they were all compelled by an initial interest in the mechanisms of design. In turn, she also had a pronounced fascination with modern architecture, and the city of Chandigarh served as another subject for her photography. Critical accounts have, once again, framed this sojourn as an example of Mohamedi's capacity to commune with the formal building blocks of modernism as commissioned and deployed by the Congress



Untitled, Nasreen Mohamedi
Black and white photograph, 36cm x 22.25cm, ca. 1970s

party. It has been proposed that this encounter with the quiet material design of Le Corbusier's civil structures was motivated by a search for a serene equilibrium in an otherwise chaotic reality. And in the face of Le Corbusier's commanding ego, combined with Nehru's developmental vision, Mohamedi's work is said to deliver modernism at a modest and humane scale.²³ However, she travelled to the city in the 1970s, and by then Chandigarh had already undergone major changes. Most significant was the designation of the city as a union territory in 1966, following the bifurcation of the Punjab province along linguistic lines and the constitution of the state of Haryana. These changes were explicitly registered in the city's civic architecture as operations at the Secretariat building were cleaved and separated, compromising Le Corbusier's careful symmetries and the promises of unification embedded in a modernist ethos of design. Built to replace Lahore as the capital of Punjab following Partition, Chandigarh as a union territory became the shared centre for both Punjab and Haryana.²⁴

Furthermore, Chandigarh was never exclusively Le Corbusier's; the Swiss architect was responsible for the grid of the basic master plan and key civil structures. He had inherited the project and initial plan from American architect and planner Albert Mayer. Other architects were responsible for the design of the bulk of the city's infrastructure and buildings. Amongst them was senior architect Pierre Jeanneret, who designed low-cost housing and remained the city's Chief Architect and Town Planner through to 1965. It has been proposed that Jeanneret's building and furniture designs executed in Chandigarh represent a syncretic and "ascetic modernism" that was "calibrated to a Gandhian political economy" and addressed the realities of labour in India and the contradictions of modern mechanised production.²⁵

A Bare Rigour

If an adjective is really desired here, what sort of modernism does Mohamedi's work participate within? Her photographic

process involved the careful, patient evaluation and separation of elements. In order to set up a dialogue between herself, her camera and the space occupied, she needed a clearing. The photographs of these supposedly empty and formal spaces are the result of a process that was far from intuitive. With each photograph, Mohamedi waited for quotidian life to disperse in order to catch a glimpse of what it brushes up against. Instead of a "modest modernism", I would like to suggest that these are rigorous studies of a bare modernism and the political striae embedded within it. And while there is an intimacy with the design of these spaces, the attention and proximity to detail always seem to be held at only a marginally safe distance of objective documentation, and the risk of forcible formal subsumption remains. Fixed on details, be it an expanse of civic space or the make-up of a particular machine, many of Mohamedi's photographs exclude any possible horizon. Here lies the productive tension of Mohamedi's studies.

Amongst the few that have written on Mohamedi's work, it is Kapur who recognises the depth and complexity of her practice and self-awareness as an artist working in India, pointing out that although her "ambient references are metaphysical and mystical, her sympathies are serenely secular".²⁶ This leads to the question of how a political reading of Mohamedi's abstract drawings might be strengthened. More specifically, how can her graphic systems of austere and minimal lines be viewed as formal experiments, not simply fixed on the goal of finding some universal serenity, but geared towards the contemplation of and engagement with the politics of tolerance so present in civic life in India, closely ascribed to western liberal models of modernity and legible in the sites she chose to photograph? In a poetic passage, Brown suggests that Mohamedi operates in the shadows of modernity where she documents the folds and fissures of its logic. By turn, Mohamedi's delicate compositions are read as analogies of the maintenance of an emergent and fractured postcolonial identity.²⁷ A consideration of the photograph of



Untitled, Nasreen Mohamedi

Black and white photograph, 38cm x 23cm, ca. 1970s

Fatehpur Sikri brings greater specificity to this proposal. In light of this image, Mohamedi's drawings begin to appear less as a corollary of a generalised postcolonial condition and more precisely as a diagrammatic study of the mechanisms, limits and ascriptions of tolerance.

Debates on these limits sketch out the various ways a secular state can operate. A survey of these can be found in the edited collection, *Secularism and Its Critics*; Rajeev Bhargava in his introduction summarises:

For some, independence or separation means mutual exclusion of two domains, where after the state adopts a policy of either interventionist control or of strict non-interference. For others, independence entails neutrality understood as equidistance, i.e., a policy to help or hinder different religions to an equal degree.²⁸

To this, Bhargava adds another interpretation, one of "principled distance, a flexible but value-based relation that accommodates intervention as well as abstention".²⁹

These keywords of the various models of tolerance – *equidistance*, *principled distance*, *interventionist control*, *strict non-interference*, as well as the dual preparations for both 'intervention' and 'abstention' – motivate and inform my proposal. Through her drawings, Mohamedi approached and studied tolerance via a pragmatic experiment elaborated

through research, composition and the motions of drawing. At the outset, Mohamedi fixed a protocol of action and remained committed to working within these prescribed limits. Each drawing was a variation on the same basic system. She drew out majorities, dominant elements, and then introduced a body of minor elements and interruptions. In this process, she attempted to calculate if the equality between all elements would hold. Most importantly, many of Mohamedi's graphic systems depend on the overlaying and intersection of multiple patterns in place of a regulative isolation of discrete elements. From this emerge dense areas within the system that shimmer as groupings of lines intersect and contradict one another. While Mohamedi discarded any work marred by errors – blemished by spills, slips and sudden marks – the pragmatism behind her repeated experiments should not be ascribed to a vulgar perfectionism or utopianism. Rather, it might be more suitable to think of each new experiment as a rigorous and renewed concern with an ever-recurrent fallibility – that is, the struggle to endure the possibility of collapse and to hold onto the model proposed.

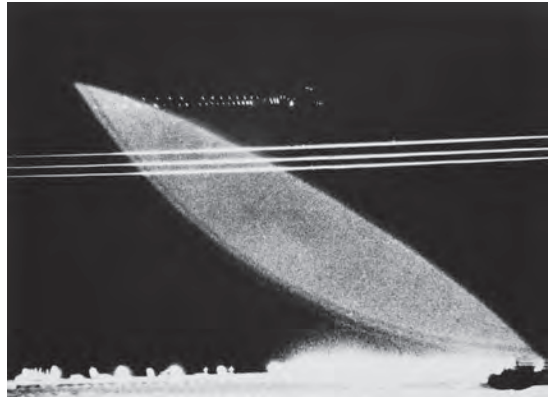
Addressing the precarious state of secularism in India, Kapur writes, "Its trivialization, its unrealized potential and its further erosion are a matter of trauma and grief, and of determined action". She continues, noting that secularism is not "a political abstraction as many people have too readily argued; it is inscribed not only in the Constitution but within the experience of tradition and in the ethics of modernity in India".³⁰ While Kapur's text is prompted by more recent events, consider her proposal of tolerance as distributed and held in common. For Kapur, the concrete value of tolerance is not exclusive to legal protocol – a constitution, as we know, can be suspended, something Mohamedi witnessed firsthand during the Emergency. Rather, tolerance is subtended though its circulation between local and transnational circuits.

Positioning Mohamedi under this lens also helps bring to question the assigned and assumed neutrality of her abstraction. As Wendy Brown notes:

...tolerance as a political practice is always conferred by the dominant, it is always a certain expression of domination even as it offers protection or incorporation to the less powerful, and tolerance as an individual virtue has a similar asymmetrical structure.³¹

The rhetoric of tolerance, she writes, evokes “seemliness, propriety, forbearance, magnanimity, cosmopolitanism, universality”.³² The identification of a concern with tolerance in Mohamedi’s work provides us with the critical tools to think anew of the political position and positioning of artists in 1970s India. In the face of the political pressures that pushed her contemporaries into explicit and representational forms, for why did Mohamedi persist with her serial drawings?

On abstraction in South Asia, Iftikhar Dadi writes, “the move toward formalism and abstraction is necessitated not simply by avoidance of ideological exigencies and manipulation but as a positivity that artists enact to explore personal and social predicaments of modernity”.³³ Dadi’s study focuses on artists in Pakistan, with particular interest paid to calligraphic abstraction; however, he acknowledges that these experiments emerged “parallel with their counterparts in Indian”.³⁴ His concern of “how the national and the social press against artistic form” is shared here.³⁵ What a comparison with Mohamedi’s reveals is the predicament of thinking through modernism in 1970s India. Her drawings and photographs present schematic negotiations that weigh in on the distributed, common and potential tolerance Kapur pointed at and the vulgar circumstances of an asymmetrical, depoliticised and regulating tolerance that Brown writes of. In other words, a totality assured and provoked by the free circulation of difference, or one imposed following authoritarian order. The tension between them is all the more volatile as the former is cast increasingly as an untenable abstraction while the latter seizes its place as the norm. ■



Untitled, Nasreen Mohamedi
Black and white photograph, 36cm x 27cm, ca. 1960s

Notes

- 1 Many thanks to Katherine Hacker and John O'Brian for their ongoing guidance and encouragement towards this project; to Tom McDonough for his careful consideration and generous insights; and to Kika Throne for sudden and excited conversations.
- 2 Grant Watson. “Nasreen Mohamedi: Passage and Placement”. In *Afterall* 21, p. 30 (Summer 2009).
- 3 Grant Watson. “Moderate Modernism: On Tagore, Le Corbusier and Nasreen Mohamedi”. In *Metropolis* M 6 (December/January 2007). Available at: <http://metropolism.com/magazine/2007-no6/gematigd-modernisme/english> (last accessed 19 February 2013).
- 4 Artists in both India and Pakistan travelled widely and often studied abroad in the decades following Partition. This mobility is not exclusive to the postcolonial period. Iftikhar Dadi, however, notes that the increased funding and support of these activities needs to be considered in light of American cultural policies elaborated during the Cold War. Iftikhar Dadi. **Modernism and**

- the Art of Muslim South Asia** (University of North Carolina, 2010, Chapel Hill, NC), p. 100.
- 5 Yashodhara Dalmia. **The Making of Modern Indian Art: The Progressives** (Oxford University Press, 2001, New Delhi), p. 72.
 - 6 Watson, "Nasreen Mohamedi: Passage and Placement", op. cit., p. 29.
 - 7 Cornelia Butler. "Nasreen Mohamedi". In **Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution** (Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007, Los Angeles), p. 268.
 - 8 Grant Watson. "Memories of Nasreen: A Conversation with Jeram Patel". In **Drawing Space: Contemporary Indian Drawing** (Institute of International Visual Arts, 2000, London), p. 33.
 - 9 Geeta Kapur. "Nasreen Mohamedi: Dimensions out of Solitude". In (ed.) Gayatri Sinha, **Expressions and Evocations: Contemporary Women Artists of India** (Marg, 1996, Mumbai), p. 60.
 - 10 Rebecca M. Brown. **Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980** (Duke University Press, 2009, Durham, NC), p. 119.
 - 11 Ajay Sinha. "Envisioning the Seventies and the Eighties". In (ed.) Gulammohammed Sheikh, **Contemporary Art in Baroda** (Tulika, 1997, New Delhi), pp. 171-173.
 - 12 Anders Kreuger. "Making the Maximum of the Minimum: A Close Reading of Nasreen Mohamedi". In **Afterall** 21, p. 44 (Summer 2009).
 - 13 Susette Min. "Fugitive Time: Nasreen Mohamedi's Drawings and Photographs". In **Drawing Papers 52: Lines among Lines** (The Drawing Center, 2005, New York).
 - 14 Kapur, op. cit.
 - 15 I am following the dates provided by Talwar Gallery, New Delhi.
 - 16 Attilio Petruccioli. "The Geometry of Power: The City's Planning". In (eds.) Michael Brand and Glen D. Lowry, **Fatehpur-Sikri: A Sourcebook** (Harvard University, 1985, Cambridge, Mass.), pp. 50-64.
 - 17 Santhi Kavuri. **From Picturesque Ruin to World Heritage Site: A Spatial History of Fatehpur Sikri** (diss., University of California, 2002, Los Angeles), p. 14, 311. See also Santhi Kauri-Bauer, **Monumental Matters: The Power, Subjectivity, and Space of India's Mughal Architecture** (Duke University Press, 2011, Durham, NC).
 - 18 Kavuri (2002), *ibid.*, p. 292.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, p. 304.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, pp. 305-308.
 - 21 Brand and Lowry, op. cit., pp. 74-79.
 - 22 Priya Kumar. **Limiting Secularism: The Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film** (University of Minnesota Press, 2008, Minneapolis), pp. 186-187.
 - 23 Watson. "Moderate Modernism: On Tagore, Le Corbusier and Nasreen Mohamedi", op. cit.
 - 24 For a fictional account of the cultural effects of the split, see Nayantara Sahgal, **Storm in Chandigarh** (Penguin Books, 1988, New York).
 - 25 Farhan Sirajul Krim. "Modernity Transfers: The MoMA and Postcolonial India". In (ed.) Duanfang Lu, **Third World Modernism: Architecture, Development and Identity** (Routledge, 2011, London), pp. 189-210.
 - 26 Geeta Kapur. "Elegy for an Unclaimed Beloved: Nasreen Mohamedi 1937-1990". In **When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practices in India** (Tulika, 2000, New Delhi), p. 80.
 - 27 Brown, op. cit., p. 121.
 - 28 Rajeev Bhargava, introduction. (Ed.) Rajeev Bhargava, **Secularism and Its Critics** (Oxford University Press, 1998, New Delhi), p. 7.
 - 29 *Ibid.*
 - 30 Kapur. "New Internationalism". In **When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India**, op. cit., p. 335.
 - 31 Wendy Brown. **Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire** (Princeton University Press, 2006, Princeton, NJ), p. 178.
 - 32 *Ibid.*
 - 33 Dadi, op. cit., p. 98.
 - 34 *Ibid.*
 - 35 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

*The infinite universe is above all a universe of new modes of comportment and deportment. The imagination becomes an organ of quite unprecedented positivity, when, in the open horizon of the not-impossible, the unexpected has become precisely what can be expected at all times.*¹

Two years ago, I began a project that looked at unravelling the hidden world of amateur astronomers in Delhi. Beginning as a form of collective investigation with the Delhi astronomers, stories, conversations and histories came together in a slow-building chronicle of the almost obsessive group of people whose lives have been transformed by the night sky. Who were these individuals who watched the stars and invested their resources in the activity? Why did they continue to chase eclipses and other celestial phenomena across the country and sometimes the world? What drew them to the night sky? What did they see when they gazed at it night after night? What were the landscapes where such encounters took place?

As an amateur astronomer and an artist, the project was also an exercise for me in self-reflexivity. Where did I position myself within the project, or perhaps where did astronomy position itself within my practice? Two years on, there are no clear answers but many ways forward. This essay is an exploration of one of these, of the interface between astronomy and art practice, through the lens of metaphor.

Sphinxes, Sirens, Chimeras and Centaurs²

In *Imagining the Unimaginable*, Ladina Bezzola Lambert describes in detail the role and importance of metaphor in the poetics of early modern astronomy. In 1610, Galileo published his extraordinary *Sidereus Nuncius*, the first scientific treatise based on his observations of the moon, the stars and the moons of Jupiter through a telescope. His drawings describe a moon pitted and scarred, an astonishingly irregular and not-so-unfamiliar surface.

This lunar surface, which is decorated with spots like dark blue eyes in the tail of a peacock, is rendered similar to those small glass vessels which, plunged into cold water while still warm, crack and acquire a wavy surface, after which they are commonly called ice-glasses.

MAKING THE FAMILIAR STRANGE

Rohini Devasher



As Lambert points out, the images Galileo conjures to describe the lunar world are themselves a species of 'chimera'. These images and metaphors, stemming as they did from ancient myths and fables are at odd variance with the astronomical frame onto which they are mapped. They are one thing standing in for something else, pushing the limits of the known and the imagined. What Galileo was trying to do was to create a physical world out of images. To establish some kind of similarity between Earth and the moon, to try and translate these images from the telescope into something that could be understood by the reader.

Making the Familiar Strange

The combination of the fact that the telescope revealed less than it implied with the principle of a material similarity between the Earth and the Moon (and, by implication, other heavenly bodies) defined and justified a need to visualize these remote objects as physical places in the imagination. In consequence, both the significance and the role of the imagination underwent a fundamental change. It could now be used as a creative faculty, which by calling upon, separating and recombining past impressions, actively participates in the creation of alternative material worlds.³

In rendering the strange conceivable, projection has its limitations, as with Galileo's description of the dark spots on the lower horn of the moon. But studies on creative problem-solving have shown that one way of gaining new perspectives on a problem is to juxtapose it with something completely unrelated, thereby making the familiar... strange.⁴

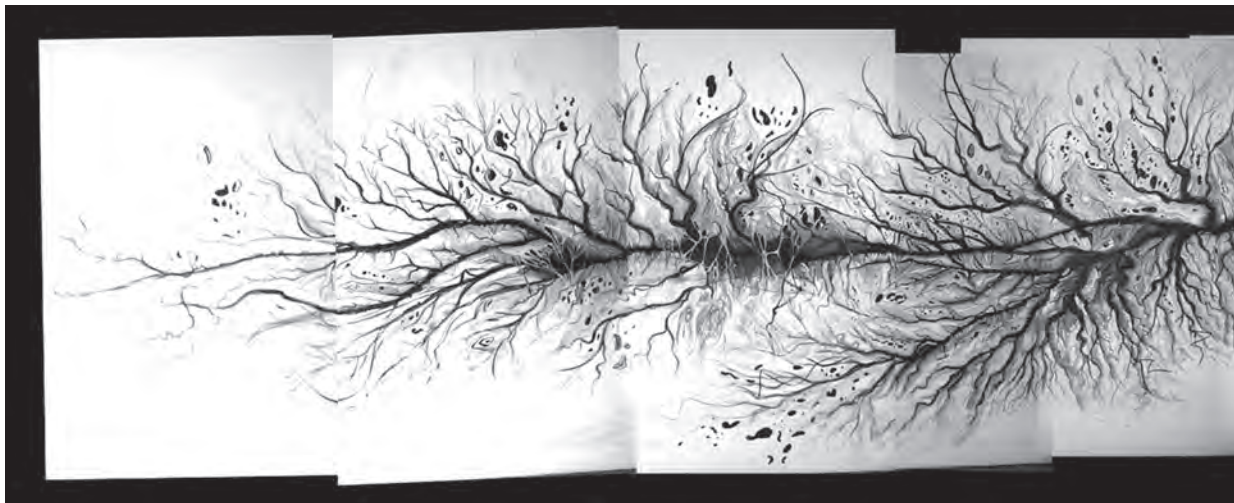
The images in this essay chart the progression of a drawing in different forms and contexts.

Drawing I

This is a preparatory sketch for a large, site-specific wall drawing that was the conclusion of a four-month residency at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG) in Berlin, March-June 2012. The image is a satellite photograph of a river bed, morphed, multiplied and expanded to cover the length of a 40ft wall. This drawing was eventually simplified in its translation onto the wall.



Preparatory sketch for a wall drawing, March-June 2012



Parts Unknown, wall drawing: acrylic, charcoal, oil pastel, 9 x 40 ft, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, 2012

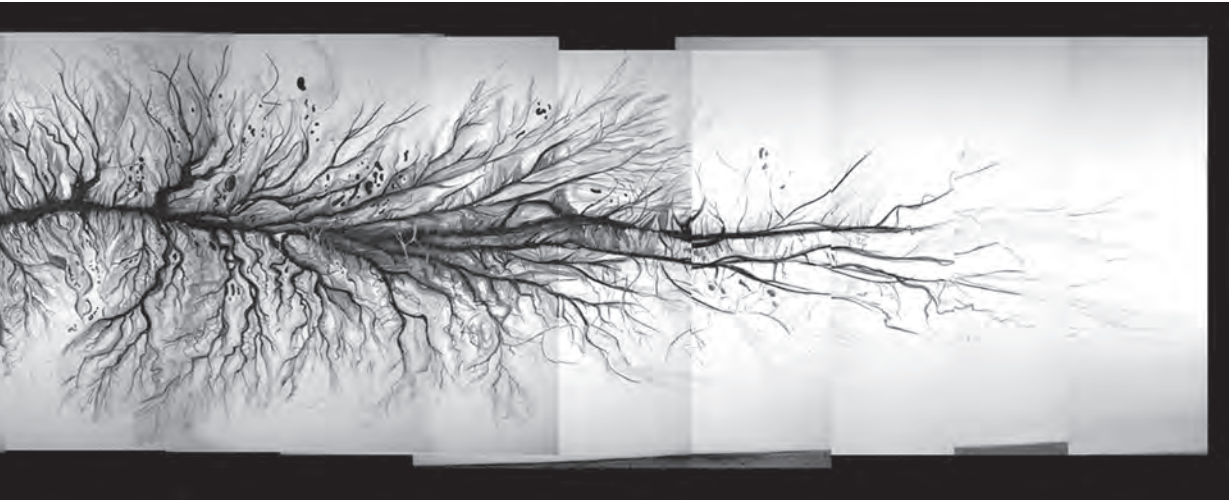
Drawing II

The drawing that resulted at the MPIWG is a jigsaw, constructed and stitched together from a variety of diverse ‘raw materials’ or ‘sources’. To the original ‘river’ were added deltas and estuaries, cloud and glacier formations, objective information gathered at a variety of spatial scales. Details emerged, topographical maps with irregular radiating circles to mark mountains and hills. Small lakes and ponds scattered like spots across the wall. Through the process of the drawing, done on site over a period of 12 days, the relationship between the drawing and the forms from which they are derived is gradually blurred until all real similarity vanishes. The textural, structural character of the original forms remains but, via a process of assemblage, agglomeration and juxtaposition, coalesces into something new. This drawing is the fifth in a series of large site-specific wall drawings⁵ that are an exploration of landscape as a living entity, of what British artist Paul Morrison has described as “cognitive landscape”, or landscape looking back.

The drawing focuses on the interface between positive and negative spaces, or the relationship of forms that share edges. The completed drawing presents you with a mental choice of one of three (or more?) interpretations, each of which is valid:

1. The dark lines running across the wall are a river system with spaces around it, an aerial view of the surrounding topography.
2. The dark lines are cracks in the wall, and you stand looking at or ‘into’ something immediately before you, something that threatens to erupt or explode.
3. You are looking deep into some form of biological branching system – neurons, blood vessels, veins, etc. – where the dark areas are wounds across a ‘body’.

These interpretations cannot co-exist, cannot be perceived at one time, they fluctuate, which creates a sense of vertigo. This sense of instability is further heightened by the fact that the drawing exploits the basic procedure of adding up heterogeneous elements without trying to synthesise them. These bits and parts can be combined, but this combination is not – and never will be – a stable combination. Hybridisation is the only possible operation and, at its best, results in an enigma that cannot be unravelled.



Drawing III

Here is a working sketch of what will be a series of hybrid print and drawing works that will examine different frames set in astronomical observatories across India. This particular image is set in the high altitude desert of Ladakh, home to the Indian Astronomical Observatory (IAO) at Hanle, at 14,500 ft, one of the highest sites in the world for optical, infrared and gamma-ray telescopes. Gamma rays are one of the most enigmatic and energetic forms of light in the universe, created by celestial events such as supernova explosions, the creation of black holes and the decay of radioactive material in space. Hanle exists today as a site of pilgrimage for astronomers across India, amateurs and professionals alike, drawn as much by the spectacular skies as by the stark landscape.

My interest in these 'alternative maps' is to try and create a sort of monographed geography, with each piece a descriptive map of new terrains and fictions, created through the layering of photographs with satellite images of the other spaces on Earth, completed by drawing once the image is printed.

An alternative hybridised world, once familiar and now strange.

I am interested in how telescopes themselves are metaphors for the "visualising of remote objects as physical places in the imagination".⁶

Peter Galison and Caroline A. Jones in their introduction to *Picturing Science Producing Art* discuss Bruno Latour's ways of pointing at absence.

The dynamic of this set of symbols (and symbols of symbols) does not function by directly invoking the final referent, but rather by a complex process of mediation that is itself the bearer of meaning.⁷

In his book, *Metaphor and Cognition: An Interactionist Approach*, Bipin Indurkha makes an interesting distinction between the different ways in which metaphors function.

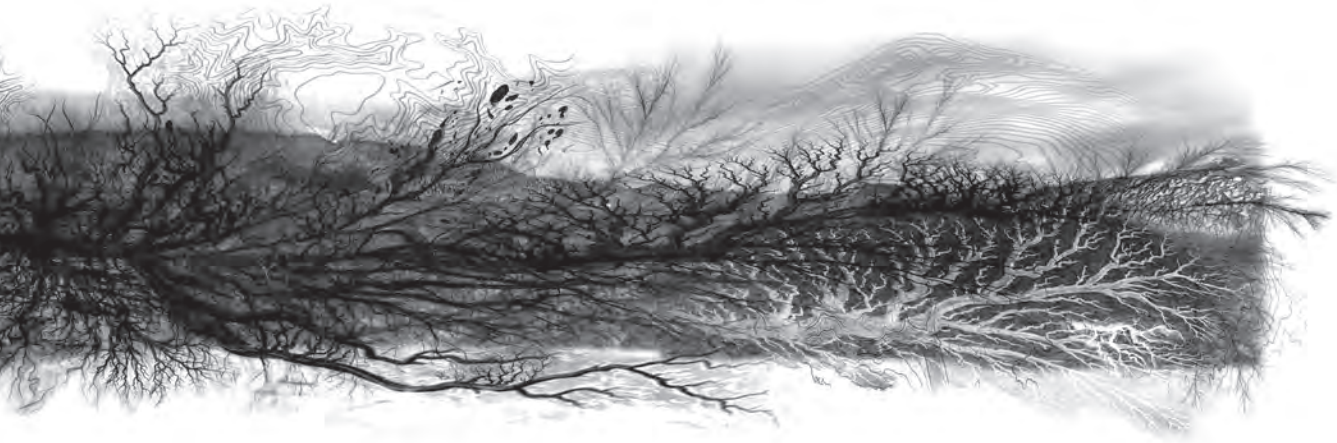
In particular, [one may see] the functioning of similarity-based metaphors as distinguished from similarity-creating metaphors. Similarity-based metaphors make comparisons between a source and its target based on some correspondence between both. With similarity-creating metaphors on the other hand there is no pre-existing parallel between source and target. They create the similarities between the two. And once this metaphor has been encountered the connection is almost obvious.

The proposition, both geographic and metaphoric offered by these frames, is in this direction. These maps will be an attempt to imply the unobservable on the basis of what can be observed.

As Simon Schama puts it, "Once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming in fact, part of the scenery".⁸ ■



Working Drawing, work in progress, December 2012



Notes

- 1 Hans Blumenberg. **Paradigms for a Metaphorology**, (trans.) Robert Ian Savage (Cornell University Press, 2010, New York).
- 2 "...for that which we imagine must be either something already seen or a composite of things and parts of things seen at different times; such are sphinxes, sirens, chimeras, centaurs etc." Galileo Galilei, *Sagredo* quoted from the **Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo [Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems]** (1632).
- 3 Ladina Bezzola Lambert. **Imagining the Unimaginable: The Poetics of Early Modern Astronomy** (Rodopi, 2002, Amsterdam, New York).
- 4 Bipin Indurkha. "On the Role of Metaphor in Creative Cognition". *Proceedings of the International Conference on Computational Creativity ICC-C-X*, Lisbon, Portugal, 7–9 January 2010, pp. 51–59.
- 5 Each drawing was done on site over a period of five to 90 days, the wall in each case custom-built. The five sites include the Winchester School of Art, 2004 (Winchester, UK); Vadhara Art Gallery, 2008 (New Delhi); Project 88, 2009 (Mumbai) and the Kiran Nadar Museum, 2012 (Noida).
- 6 Lambert, op. cit. page 9 of the introduction
- 7 Peter Galison and Caroline A. Jones. *Picturing Science Producing Art* (Routledge, 1998, New York, London).
- 8 Simon Schama. **Landscape and Memory** (Vintage, 1996, New York).

PROJECTING A BENGAL DELTA SETTLEMENT

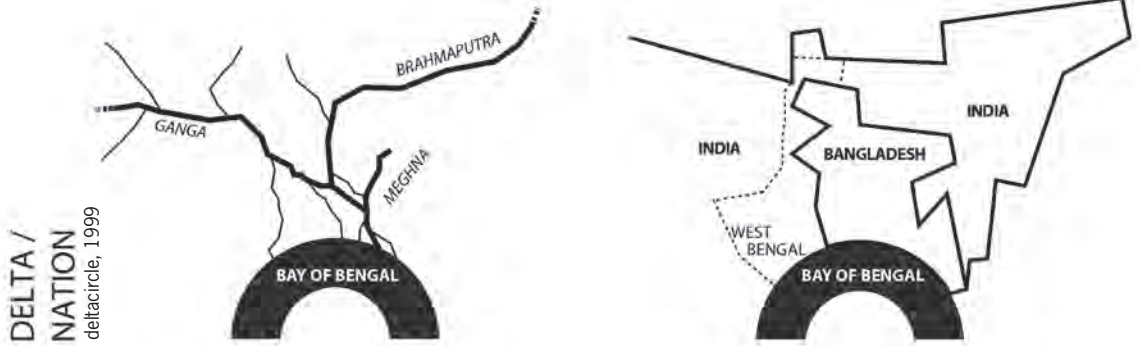
DESCRIPTION OF A LIQUID TERRITORY AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Hans Hortig + Boris Murnig

Figures state it clearly: global temperatures are rising significantly faster than only 150 years ago. The impacts of this tendency, known as global warming, are no longer hypothetical, but have become reality. The melting polar icecap, the rising sea levels and the growing hole in the ozone layer visualise abstract statistics into perceptible deviations from known conditions. In this context, the topic has become an important issue for decision-makers and planners all over the world. The aim is to prevent forecasted scenarios. But even rare flickers of hope, like the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, have shown the contradictoriness of such concepts by creating a global trade of CO₂ certificates, rather than forcing decision-makers to actually implement concepts for improving climate protection. The 2009 Copenhagen Summit, the 2010 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Mexico, the Rio Summit in 2012 and finally the Doha talks of 2012: global climate change conferences are held frequently while the goals move further and further out of reach. At the same time, impacts become visible when these partly anthropogenically-indicated changes hit human settlements, infrastructures or agrarian tracts of land. Accordingly such phenomena have to be discussed as cultural catastrophes rather than natural ones.¹

Our project follows this perception and intends to challenge the operational logics of action and effect by questioning its order and relation. Can a projection based only on statistics raise different perspectives on the situation today? It is not our intention to reach predefined development goals, but to encourage a different understanding of contemporary human habitat and its development.

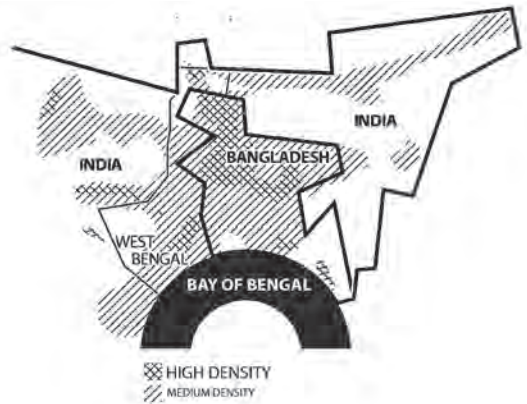
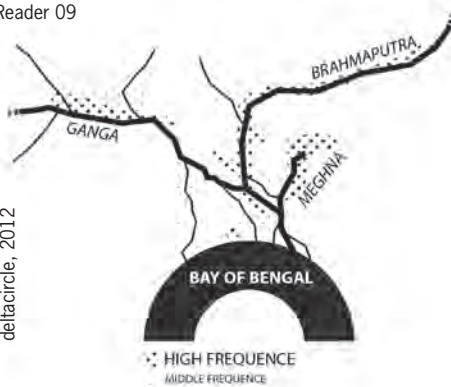
The Bengal Delta case serves as an example of projected fundamental changes caused by sea-level rise as a result, amongst other causes, of global warming. In 2010, the organisation Delta Alliance published a comparative study on the vulnerability and resilience of the world's biggest delta-regions.² According to this report, the Bengal Delta will have to face a sea-level rise of approximately 62 cm by 2080. Furthermore, a study of Dhaka University's Earth Observatory and the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbia University in New York has shown that the north-eastern part of the Indian tectonic plate subsides by about 1 cm every year.³ Thus, parts of the Delta lower than 130 cm above today's mean sea level would be flooded permanently. Considering the interplay of the impact of climate change on both sea and freshwater levels will lead to an even more complex situation. Glacier meltdown in the Himalayas and the increase of heavy rainfall will raise the water table of the region's three major rivers – the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. Most of the resulting floods will affect the low-lying deltaic areas. Inland water bodies, lakes and wetlands will expand and aggravate the severity of projected seaward flood conditions.⁴ In this sense, the Bengal Delta has to be understood as a system oscillating between dry and wet, salt- and freshwater. These continuous transformations of land will lead to a significant loss of potential living space, while the region's population will grow by about 150 percent until 2080.⁵



Currently, the Bengal Delta is home to around 150 million people.⁶ It is one of the most densely populated regions in the world, with 1,226 inhabitants per sq km,⁷ spread over both Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal. The two sides originally comprised the Bengal region, first partitioned administratively by the country's British colonial rulers in 1905. The division was withdrawn in 1911 but was made irreversible through political partition in 1947, occasioned at the time of India's becoming independent amid escalating religious tensions that led to the former British-ruled territory being divided into two states – India and Pakistan. Bangladesh, at first part of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (and called East Pakistan), declared its independence in 1971. The border between India and Bangladesh, therefore, divides a naturally continuous region across which institutional partition led to several mass migrations between 1947 and the early 1970s.

But conditions have changed over the past four decades. The work of sociologist Jason Cons, "Ambiguity and Exceptionality along the India-Bangladesh Border",⁸ for example, shows the expansion of the borderline, creating an 'exceptional' space which constantly causes tensions and conflicts between the neighbouring states. Various examples show that the affected population has learned to live with and accommodate this situation. Enclaves and counter-enclaves on both sides, continuous transitions in daily small-business routines, and the Bengali language as a base for communication and interaction on all social levels show that the border is, in reality, less clearly defined than it appears on the map.⁹ Official relations between the two countries can be described as stable, even though border issues on both sides are classified as 'sensitive' as regards national security.¹⁰ Although an in-depth analysis of the border is a crucial part of the holistic understanding of the delta region, a complete reconstruction of the border's history is beyond the scope of this article. At the moment, we focus on our notion of the Delta as a cyclic environmental system.

FLOOD / DENSITY deltacircle, 2012



The above-mentioned environmental and geological changes would lead to acute land scarcity, resulting in concentrations of an even higher population density, thus causing additional pressure on the space at hand. The tide would propagate more than 20 km into the south-west region of Bangladesh;¹¹ to illustrate this more clearly, Khulna, for example, home to about 1.3 million people and today located in inland Bangladesh, would find itself at the edge of a new coastline. Energy support and food production in the whole region as well as labour opportunities would likely be hit hardest by the relocated waterfronts. People living in the Delta have always practiced a two-way relationship of change and adaptation with their natural environment. This time, millions would have to adapt their lifestyle according to the progression of the waterfronts. They would face a situation of extreme densification and will therefore be forced to find new strategies of habitation.

The Bengal Delta could then be seen as a continuous human settlement, filling up what might retrospectively be called the urban gap between Kolkata and Dhaka. Regarding population density, it could easily be compared with major metropolitan areas worldwide.¹² The only difference: the Delta Settlement in 2080 would be home to about 225 million people, living in an area of about 100,000 sq km!

Such numeric games obviously cannot lead directly to serious conclusions but can stress the necessity to rethink this region as a human habitat: a territory which is subject to natural influences as well as to profound socio-economic changes. The Bengal Delta Settlement, therefore, not only deals with the loss of space, but intends to set up a model of understanding based on the interaction between space, time and population.

POPULATION / DISTRIBUTION deltacircle, 2012

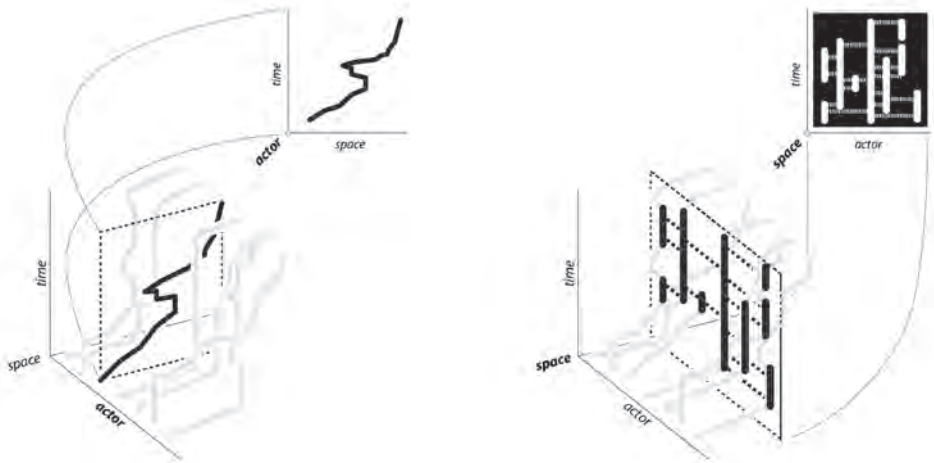


Floods have to be rethought as tides and understood as a frequently occurring part of a natural ecosystem. Rather than thinking about flood protection on an institutional level, one has to deal with the adaptation strategies of the affected population. Such strategies can already be

observed in today's situation, but will become even more apparent in the projected Delta settlement. Beyond this background, cyclic conditions of dry season and monsoon will become even more important for the local lifestyle. While during the monsoon season, people will generally be forced to live in extremely dense conditions, the dry season could lead masses to the floodplains. This temporary space could furthermore open up labour opportunities and, at least for some time, provide an additional area of livestock.

The dimension of this situation would by far exceed what is referred to as a nomadic lifestyle – it leads us to the hypothesis of a liquid territory. Liquidity, in this context, stands for floating with the gravity of available space: it is not the settler alone who moves, but the settlement as a whole which is transformed! A structure which is expanding and contracting, which literally seems to breathe, in addition to available space.

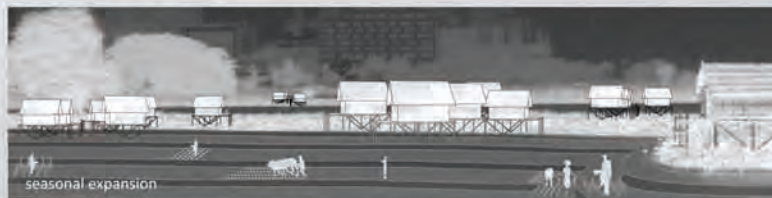
HABITAT / BIOTOPE deltacircle, 2011



Through the use of two different perspectives – ‘habitat’ and ‘biotope’ – we (p)reconstruct the functionality of the projected settlement and link it with today's situation. We are finally facing a new pattern of human settlement which doesn't contemplate urbanity any more: there is city everywhere and nowhere. A liquid territory which defines itself at the crossing of human and natural activity. We understand this reading of the Bengal Delta as a shift from spatial to transitional thinking. Transitional not only as a constant movement within and through space, but especially as the movement of space. It is motion – the link between space and time – which we are interested in! ■



The Bengal Delta settlement cannot be followed without taking into account seasonal expansion and contraction. Therefore we intend to rethink planners' view on the relation between locality and temporality. As (landscape) architects we have been educated to think in pre-defined categories like "urban" or "rural" - attributes which are not adequate to follow and understand a fluctuating human habitat. The Delta Settlement forces us to leave behind these "safe" but at the same time vague definitions in favour of a territorial approach: a system consisting of different actors, their connections, communities, conflicts. Consequently we end up thinking in capacities, velocities and residuals instead of quantities.



flooded situation / densification



Ahmad, 29
vegetable vendor



trip documentation

geografical tracking

station documentation



08:35 PM home

motor cycle 60 km

05:45 PM

transit trainstation



The "Habitat" describes the distribution of space related to a given actor. It is the living space of a single person, a community or a species in general. The "Habitat" represents the movement through space over time.

train 327 km



07:35 AM

transit trainstation

bus 15 km

06:35 AM

walk 2,2 km

06:15 AM

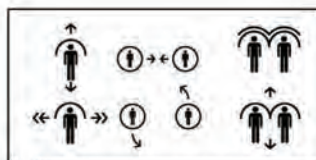
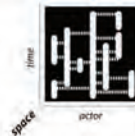


busstand

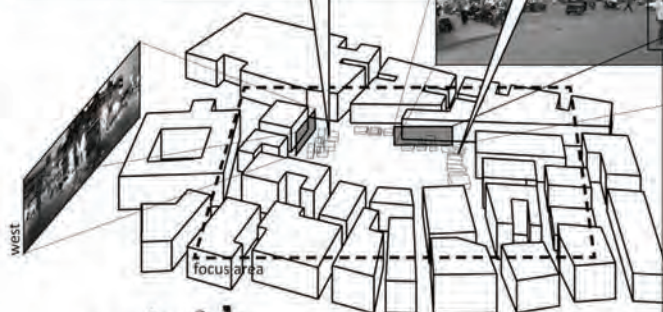
market



The "Biotope" stands for a certain area, often characterised by abiotic parameters like water, climate or light conditions. Its most important quality appears as its neutrality: A "Biotope" cannot per se be associated with categories like "the city", "the state" or "the nation". It is a functional cluster which can be located in environmental surroundings like rivers, forests or open scrub land as well as anthropogenic systems like market places, high rise buildings or cityscapes. Even if a "Biotope" can be defined geographically it depends on the logic of change: Every actor defining the "Biotope" needs a minimum of interaction which foster or disrupt its transformation. The "Biotope" shows temporary changes of a specific location.



north



Ahmad, 29
Vegetable vendor



Abhik, 52
"...having lunch at
the market every
day..."



Notes

- 1 Greg Bankoff. "No Such Thing as Natural Disasters". In **Harvard International Review**, 2010. Available at: <http://hir.harvard.edu/no-such-thing-as-natural-disasters> (last accessed 15 December 2012).
- 2 Institute of Water Modelling (IWM): Government of Bangladesh. "Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna Delta". In (eds.) Tom Bucx, Marcel Marchand, Bart Makaske and Cees van de Guchte, **Comparative Assessment of the Vulnerability and Resilience of 10 Deltas: Work Document: Delta Alliance Report No. 1** (Delta Alliance International, 2010, Delft-Wageningen, The Netherlands), pp. 39-62.
- 3 Ibid., p. 43.
- 4 Ibid., p. 42.
- 5 Ibid., p. 47.
- 6 Ibid., p. 41.
- 7 Ibid., p. 40.
- 8 Jason Cons. "A Politics of Sensitivity: Ambiguity and Exceptionality along the India-Bangladesh Border". In **Sarai Reader 07: Frontiers** (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2007, Delhi), pp. 20-29. Available at: http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/07-frontiers/20-29_jason.pdf (last accessed 15 December 2012).
- 9 David Luddens writes about the shifting nation from cultural territories to state borders in early north-east Bengal in "Political maps and cultural territories" (**Himal South Asian** 16(7) (July 2003). Available at: <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~dludden/LuddenHIMALSylhet1.htm> (last accessed 15 December 2012).
- 10 Cons, op. cit., p. 23.
- 11 IWM, op. cit., p. 42.
- 12 See also "City Mayors Statistics: Largest Cities in the World Ranked by Population Density". Available at: <http://www.citymayors.com/statistics/largest-cities-density-125.html> (last accessed 23 October 2012).

MÖGLICHKEITSFORMEN

EXPECTATION AND EXPERIMENT IN THE WORK OF

Andrew Stefan Weiner

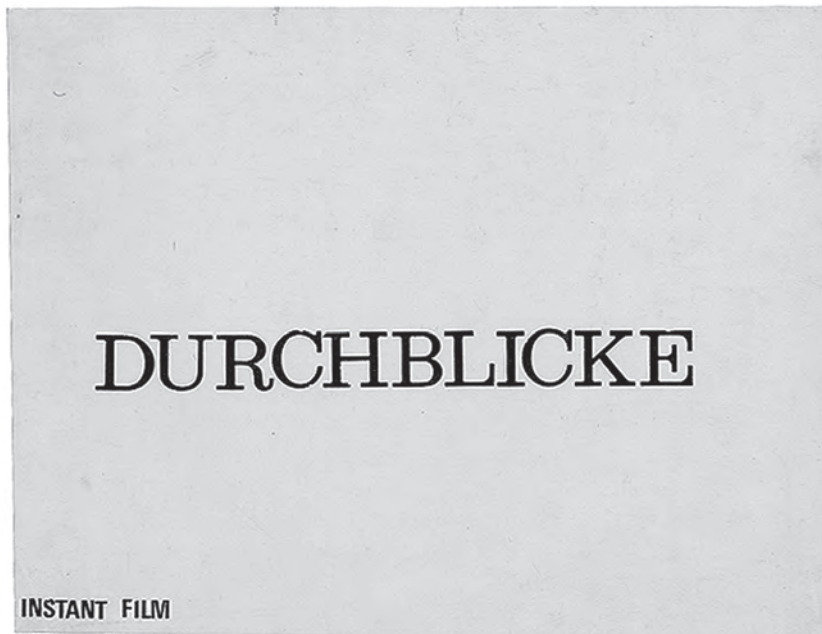
THE AUSTRIAN FILMMAKERS COOPERATIVE, 1968-69

Three Forms of Possibility

The project consists only of this: a sheet of transparent rectangular plastic, printed with the phrase *DURCHBLICKE* ('views' or 'perspectives') and promoted under the title, *Instant Film*. Viewers are told they are free to produce their own films however they like, simply by looking through the plastic aperture. They can film in the street, on a mountain, in the classroom, in the bedroom. They can make their own documentaries, thrillers, confessions. They can film friends, strangers, lovers, comrades, themselves... they can film themselves filming.

So what sort of freedom is this exactly? At first glance, it would seem to be a brilliantly economical emancipation from the social relations that the cinema imposes. With no more than a concept and a piece of plastic, viewers are released from the customary position of passive consumption to become screenwriters, actors or directors, switching between these roles as they choose. All of the invisible mediations that comprise cinematic representation become visible, tangible and thus, it would seem, malleable. In effectively collapsing the functions of camera, projector and screen, the plastic reduces cinema to something like its essentials, from which it might be radically reconceived and rebuilt.

But no lens is perfectly transparent, and this picture of unlimited freedom is soon obstructed. The credibility of the project weakens as soon as one pays attention to the title, which recalls the innovations of the post-war consumer society – instant coffee, instant photo developing – and with them, the ceaseless promise to make life easier. In crucial respects, *Instant Film* exhibits the application of this logic to political filmmaking, sharply undercutting its own ostensibly democratic promises. Anyone can make a film, it seems to say... and these films will all show the same people, looking at each other.

*Instant Film*, VALIE EXPORT, 1968

The audience sits in the cinema and waits. Then the lights dim, the curtains part and the projector rattles into motion. For some moments, it is unclear just what might be happening, if anything. There appear shadows and faint traces of movement but no image as such. Then the curtains lurch back into motion, closing once more. Has there been some malfunction? A misunderstanding? Before these questions can be resolved, the curtains open again, but this time it is clear that something is off. The thick fabric of the curtain shimmers slightly, almost as if seen through a layer of water.

One imagines a brief moment where it seems that some sort of spectral vision is transpiring, a suspension of the usual laws of appearance and perception. But quickly enough it becomes clear exactly what is happening: a film of the screen is being projected, in which the curtains repeatedly close and open. The theatre operator tries to synchronise the movement of the actual curtains with these filmed movements but is bound to falter intermittently. This awkward call-and-response continues for only a few minutes before the film ends, trailing a chain of questions.

What is the meaning of this double screen, this double curtain, this double projection? Under what conditions is the ostensibly real event forced to play catch-up with its representation, which somehow always seems to precede it, as if in some sort of ontological reversal? What if, when narrative and depiction are removed from film, all that remain are relations of control? And what sort of message is conveyed by this halting, stuttering shuttling between opposites: open/closed, present/absent, yes/no?



Yes/No (Curtain Film), Ernst Schmidt, Jr., 1968

A projector is set up on a low table, facing a bare wall. A tabloid-sized sheet of white paper has been fixed to the wall to make a cheap, temporary screen. This field remains empty, save for a single word – ‘possible’, rendered in lower-case, sans-serif letters, placed just to the right of centre. The projector clatters on, but nothing changes; the word does not yield to others, as in a title sequence, or change shape, as in an animation. Viewers who move in for a closer look will realise that their shadows do not change this picture, and that the word that first seemed to be a projected image is in fact written directly on the screen.

As with the preceding examples, the strict removal of a film's typical elements generates a counterintuitive effect. Where one might expect didactics or aesthetic poverty, one instead finds a hive of questions, perceptions and speculations, which seem to interact and self-replicate. Is this a poem in the process of becoming a film, or the reverse? Does this installation transpose text into the realm of architecture? How does it alter the experience of one's own embodiment to stand between the projector and the screen? What sort of possibility is being modelled, critiqued or actualised here? And what might this work have to say about how our expectations are formed – and how might they yet be transformed?



Possible, Peter Weibel, 1969

Sites of Projection, Scenes of Contradiction

Each of the preceding descriptions refers to an experiment with cinematic projection undertaken during the years 1968-69 by a member of the Austrian Filmmakers Cooperative (AFC), a group that also included Kurt Kren and Hans Scheugl. These three examples are meant to stand in for the broad spectrum of meanings and functions that projection came to assume in the work of the Cooperative during this period. (A partial list would include projecting images onto bodies; introducing foreign materials into the projector; making projection dependent on a noise-dependent, audience-enabled switch; cutting holes in screens in accord with a projected image; and using the female body as a 'screen' for audiences to 'view' with their hands.)¹

Taken together, these experiments begin to suggest the ambitions, convictions and conflicts that characterised radical art and underground film in Austria *circa* 1968. This moment, while brief, witnessed an exceptional proliferation of new artistic forms and strategies, many of them organised around the articulation of ostensibly disparate media: painting and sculpture; experimental poetry, theatre and performance; technical formats including film, photography and audio recording. Whereas at that time such practices were often interpreted through the aggregative ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the practices of the AFC indicated a very different model for thinking intermedia: not as an incipient totality, but as a site of contingent crossings and potential frictions. This innovative, singular approach owed much to the unusual circumstances of post-1945 Austria, in which a relatively isolated and repressive society gave rise to several of the most radical neo-avant-gardes, including the Vienna Group, the Viennese Actionists and the structural film of Peter Kubelka and the early Kren – all of which intersected in the activities of the AFC.

If this tendency suggests the need to re-evaluate critiques of intermedia made by influential figures like Rosalind Krauss, it also underscores the importance of recovering this history, which is still largely under-recognised outside Central Europe.² (Among many subsequent works with clear affinities to the precedent of the AFC, we might mention the series of *No-Movies* made in the mid-1970s by the Los Angeles-based Chicano collective, Asco, or the

politicised projections executed in the 1980s in cities like London and New York by Krzysztof Wodiczko.³) While this essay means to propose preliminary grounds for such a re-evaluation, it also seeks to raise questions about projection more generally that exceed the disciplinary boundaries of film history, art history or contemporary criticism. In doing so, it takes the multifarious practices of the AFC as emblematic of the many ways in which projection might yet continue to exert generative effects, even as its technical substrates and social emplacements have undergone any number of profound transformations.

Viewing the production of the AFC collectively, its most distinguishing trait was arguably the dialectical rigour it brought to its object. Against the McLuhanite optimism of their contemporaries in Western Europe or the United States, many of whom were associated with Expanded Cinema, figures like Weibel and EXPORT viewed film with a greater degree of scepticism. They neither embraced cinema as an emancipatory extension of the sensorium nor denounced it as an instrument of hegemony. Instead, they engaged it from within as a force field of shifting power relations, one that could reflexively inform their own experiments with it. In doing so, they argued that cinema must be grasped as a compound form of communication, one that integrates the mediation of the sign with other phenomena that we perceive (or imagine) as 'real'. It is not that cinema replaces reality with the simulation of the sign, but rather that it combines them in a sort of circuit where 'real' objects and phenomena can function like signs and vice versa.

Within such an approach, projection assumed a decisive, complex role. Anticipating the insights that apparatus theorists would advance in the 1970s, the AFC viewed projection as a privileged means to understand and contest the reproduction of ideology.⁴ It did so by registering the ways in which the cinema aligns multiple divergent agencies of projection: technical (the properties of specific optical devices); aesthetic (the phenomenological basis of cinematic vision); social (prevailing conditions of viewership); psychosexual (fetishism and the gendered gaze); and ideological (cinema as capitalist dream-world). Having developed this model, it was then possible to subject it to various mechanisms of analysis, foremost among which was recombination, a mathematically derived procedure through which specific functions of the cinematic apparatus were transposed.

This process recalled the permutational editing schemes previously developed by Kubelka and Kren. However, rather than alter a sequence of frames, they exchanged the many components of the cinematic *dispositif*: technical elements such as film material, the camera, the processing lab, the projector and the screen; aesthetic elements, like light, sound, form, time and montage; and socio-political elements, including the participation of viewers and producers, and the representational regimes enabling the cinema to signify. Ultimately, this radical conception allowed for a practice that aimed not only to expand film into other artistic media, but into the sites of collective contestation, whether in the cinema, the street or the act of signification.

By recombining the components of this ensemble – subjecting projection itself to a kind of re-projection or montage – it became possible to call attention to and even alter its mediating function, such that the reality of representation was not only exposed, but reconfigured. This approach did not aim simply to uncover the contradictions within cinema, it took these contradictions as its materials or, in a sense, its medium. In certain cases, it even encompassed the disjunctions between cinema and other formats, as in EXPORT's claim that effective images are located "[in] the fractures between media".⁵ By recombining distinct media into new forms – EXPORT would later term them "medial anagrams" – such disagreements located a strategic value in the interstitial space between these fractures.⁶

The best known example of this approach was the *Tap and Touch Cinema* (1968), which was staged by EXPORT with Weibel's assistance. This "Cinema Action" was executed in vari-

ous cities before random passersby. Audience members were invited to visit the 'cinema', a box worn by EXPORT with openings through which they could 'view the film' by handling her bare breasts. With its minimal production costs, the action not only opposed itself to mainstream cinema, but redefined it by positing gendered power relations as specific to that form. It went on to subject cinema to a radical series of recombinations: reversing the gaze such that the voyeur became viewed; recoding the female body from passive to active; altering the relations of film production, with the viewer simultaneously becoming participant and object; making the visual image haptic; replacing distanced sight with proximate touch; and relocating projection to the street.

Tap- and Touch-Cinema,
VALIE EXPORT, 1968



In November 1968, the same month as the first performance of the *Tap- and Touch-Cinema*, Weibel premiered a very different Cinema Action, entitled *Exit*, as part of an independent film festival. The audience sat before a 'prepared screen', which was covered in aluminium foil and punctured in several places. Weibel spoke from a script while a film was projected on to the screen. Suddenly, fireworks began shooting from the screen directly into the audience. A small crew of collaborators continued this assault by igniting smoke bombs and lobbing fire-crackers over the screen. From what little is known about the event, it appears that audience members sought cover under their seats before fleeing the smoke-filled cinema.

Despite their manifold differences, *Exit* and the *Tap- and Touch-Cinema* nevertheless occupied the same contradictory conjuncture – one in which the radical potential of the approaches developed by the AFC would be largely compromised. On the one hand, there was relatively meagre support in Austria for the sort of New Left cultural politics that had taken root in countries like West Germany and France. On the other, Weibel and EXPORT began to enjoy a different sort of success throughout Central and Northern Europe, appearing in independent cinemas, universities and multimedia rock shows.

As a young, attractive couple prone to advertising their own sexual liberation onstage, Weibel and EXPORT projected the personae of countercultural antiheroes like Bonnie and Clyde or Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin. The two increasingly flirted with militancy – as in the 1969 *Art War Campaign*, in which Weibel tried to build incendiary traffic blockades and which ended after EXPORT was attacked by an audience member. Soon thereafter, the pair was charged with indecency violations in Austria after publishing the first collection of Actionist documentation. While they each continued to produce critical media art, they largely retreated from their action-oriented practice of the late 1960s and from its potent yet problematic articulation of art, violence, technics and spectacle.

Stones and Questions: Horizons of Projection

Other members of the AFC met with similarly problematic success. In 1968, Hans Scheugl produced the 'material film', zzz: *Hamburg Spezial*, which he performed by running a length of string through the projector, with the resulting shadow creating the impression of a slowly undulating fissure in the screen. The next year, Scheugl was featured on the popular Austrian TV programme, *Apropos Film* – not as a serious filmmaker, but rather as a kind of curiosity. In the broadcast, the host mocked underground film as an example of radical decadence. Invoking a familiar – and deeply troubled – opposition between artist and *Volk*, he condemned Scheugl for launching “a hate tirade against his fatherland”, adding that “people like us try in vain to find a meaning in such films”.⁷

Doubtless aware of how his work would be misconstrued in such a venue, Scheugl attempted to stage an attack from within, using the broadcast as a sort of Trojan horse. In a pre-recorded segment set in an empty construction site, Scheugl deployed an array of confrontational tactics: challenging viewers to change the channel, deriding them as “slobbering gawkers” and criticising the reactionary, neo-fascist tendencies of universities, museums and the mass media. After lobbing a stone at the camera in a symbolic attack, the filmmaker went on to lay other stones in the earth as a tribute to fellow artists who had emigrated (Hermann Nitsch, Günter Brus) or taken their own lives (Herbert Bayer, Rudolf Schwarzkogler). Such an ambivalent, compromised gesture suggests the need to proceed carefully in evaluating the legacy of the AFC during this brief, conflicted period.

It might be tempting to side with Scheugl and view the group as an embattled vanguard of revolutionaries, waging war against hegemony from an underground refuge somewhere outside or beneath the territory of spectacle. But this would overlook the crucial fact that the power of the AFC's experiments derived from its immanent engagement with the technical and aesthetic bases of hegemonic sensation. In such an approach, spectacle was not a projected illusion that could simply be interrupted or abandoned – as in Plato's allegory of the cave, a metaphor that informs the later Marxist (and Debordian) critique of ideology. Rather, it was a much more pervasive condition from which any attempt at opposition could not easily separate itself. Its components could be recombined, but not without removing the risk of recuperation or other unintended consequences.

This characteristic undecidability – the way in which the practices of the AFC tended to open themselves towards unforeseeable consequences – orients us towards the fact that

projection necessarily assumes both spatial and temporal dimensions. We do not only project films or voices or fantasies; we also project ourselves forward in time. This occurs not only through deliberate acts of imagination, but also through the unconscious mechanisms of recollection and anticipation by which we carry out the processes of temporalisation, thereby making our own sense of time. This activity was first theorised as such by the philosopher Edmund Husserl, whose account of temporality relies on the concept of a “horizon of expectation”.⁸ Insofar as this poetic metaphor condenses the spatial and temporal elements mentioned above, we can transpose it into the current context in the form of a horizon of projection. Such a concept was clearly at work in practices like that of Peter Weibel, who kept a notebook of “projected projects” in which he elaborated concepts for Cinema Actions and other forms of experimental cinema, many unrealised.

How might this horizon be constituted or modified? In what ways does it inform our memory, our sense of present experience or our ability to imagine different futures? How does this mediation impact our sense of what an event can or should be? The most generative aspect of the AFC’s legacy is arguably its ability to address such questions and to reshape our sense of their significance. The potential of such capacities, as exhibited in the works discussed above, should by now be sufficiently clear. Taken together, these show that the horizon of the AFC was not only the production of new forms of cinema, sensation or encounter, but the generation of what they termed *Möglichkeitsformen* (forms of possibility), in which our very relationship to the future would be altered. This anticipatory projection of work and audience, itself the product of a specific history – one which has since passed in many ways, if not all – now returns to us as an open question, one whose implications remain to be decided. ■

Notes

- 1 For an overview of this body of work, see Hans Scheufl, **Erweitertes Kino: Die Wiener Filme der 60er Jahre [Expanded Cinema: 1960s Viennese Film]** (Triton Verlag, 2002, Vienna).
- 2 Krauss articulates her critique of intermedia most extensively in “A Voyage on the North Sea”, in **Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition** (Thames and Hudson, 2000, London); see also Krauss, “Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition”, **October** 116, pp. 55-62 (Spring 2006).
- 3 An overview of Asco’s production can be found in the recent exhibition catalogue **Asco: Elite of the Obscure: A Retrospective 1972-1987** (Hatje Cantz, 2011, Ostfildern); for a critical account of Wodiczko’s projections, see Rosalyn Deutsch, **Evictions** (MIT Press, 1998, Cambridge, MA).
- 4 Central texts from the debates over apparatus theory are collected in (ed.) Philip Rosen, **Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology** (Columbia University Press, 1986, New York).
- 5 VALIE EXPORT. “Medial Anagrams”, (trans.) Camilla R. Nielsen. In (ed.) Sabine Breitwieser, **White Cube/Black Box** (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1996, Cologne), p. 125.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 **Apropos Film: Underground**, broadcast on ORF, 12 September 1969.
- 8 For a philosophically and politically informed analysis of this concept in a contemporary context, see Peter Osborne, “Expecting the Unexpected: Beyond the ‘Horizon of Expectation’”, in (eds.) Maria Hlavajova, Simon Sheikh and Jill Winder, **On Horizons: A Critical Reader on Contemporary Art** (BAK, 2011, Utrecht).

Image Sources

- *Instant Film*, VALIE EXPORT, 1968. <http://www.valieexport.at/typo3temp/pics/036d98fa83.jpg>
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- *Tap- and Touch-Cinema*, VALIE EXPORT, 1968. [http://www.valieexport.at/en/werke/werke/?tx_ttnews\[cat\]=182&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=1956&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=190&cHash=05f7085f9d](http://www.valieexport.at/en/werke/werke/?tx_ttnews[cat]=182&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=1956&tx_ttnews[backPid]=190&cHash=05f7085f9d)

EXPANDING THE POSSIBILITIES OF PAINTING IN SPACE

FLUCTUATION BETWEEN TIMELESS AND TIME-BASED PERCEPTION

Silke Eva Kästner

I pursue a practice of painting that maintains independence within the context of the built environment and highlights new connections and relationships between the architectural, social and functional contexts. I aim to offer more than one right way of looking. On the one hand, I want others to experience a multi-perspective way of seeing an art work that gives new associations and shows dimensions depending on your personal viewpoint. On the other, I invite viewers to become an active participant of the work.

The expansion of painting into space allows direct physical contact for the viewer who moves through the space and can even touch the material.

What kinds of possibilities do I see in painting?

Painting offers uninhibited familiarity in a special way (Hegel). I try to somehow seduce the spectator, passerby to play with the colours and materials without feeling self-conscious by being in an exposed place.

A painting which is happening at non-art-specific places within the urban context allows people to, all of a sudden and unexpectedly, be confronted with an art work that connects with their own daily experiences. I am interested in these moments, in which functional space skips into a pictorial space.



Swing Space, Silke Kästner, detail from one of six paintings in public places, New York, 2008

PHOTO: JÖRG HANDKE

In this approach I intend to renegotiate public space, to call habits into question and to reclaim a creative, non-verbal communication in physical space. Working in public without asking for permission creates a tension between supposed openness and the de facto absence of freedom.

I work during the daytime, facing the possibility that the painting process can be stopped at any moment.

On the other hand, for me painting comes from inner time in the sense of the inner thought and contemplation of the individual which expands whenever we are able to follow our imagination and our own rhythm. Therefore, the quality of time is changing through this investigation of the material. These moments free us from the social constraints and the purposeful rationality that pervade everyday life.

As a painter with the presumption of a dialogic relation between the material, the architectural space and the social environment, I push certain material towards a vision, observe the material in the presence of its own obstacles, follow and even provoke coincidences.

There is some freedom in losing control through following the physical properties of materials and involving others in the creative process. My key interest is to challenge the possibilities of colour and painting in public spaces as a link in a larger context of social



Blur, Silke Kästner,
Galery Waschhaus Kreuzberg, 2007,
PHOTO: HIROFUMI MATSUZAKI

function. Changing places that we use only in a restricted way.

Wet paint has the quality of a transitional state of being. It is fluid and flexible. Drops of paint follow gravity, blur other liquids, and stain. I wonder how I could use the natural, physical properties of liquid colour how I could keep the fluidity of colour, even if it is dried up? Colour possesses an expanding, running potential, colour metamorphoses and also can be washed away.

The other variable in the painting process is the viewer, who is at the

same time participating in various ways and not only by a multi-perspective perception while walking into or through a three-dimensional art work. I aim to create a situation in which the participants activate the transformation of the material. For example, in Shimla, India, I covered the entrance of a tunnel with white painted newspaper which urged passersby to break through it. In *Cusec III*, visitors could change the composition by moving monochrome painted papers throughout the duration of the exhibition. Some of the papers were even painted by participants.

I repeat painting concepts in different sites. A concept is mainly defined by using the same material, for example newspaper and white paint, or a trolley of one-dollar tins from the hardware store which I push through the city. In *Drop*, I delivered a large white sheet of newspaper with a set of instructions to an opening, inviting viewers to interact with it in a certain way. In this case, my role as an artist is to be an initiator and a catalyst, and to then back away, so that the processes I initiated could proceed even without my assistance.

Tunnel covered with newspaper by Silke Kästner, Shimla, 2010, PHOTO: SILKE KÄSTNER



In this way, painting is maybe the practice of flexibility which we need nowadays in adapting to a space that is changing quickly as we share it with people from different backgrounds and experiences. I understand painting not as a timeless universal masterpiece, but as ephemeral, time-based, site-specific experience or participative active painting.

The surface of painting then becomes the surface that is capturing an action that is related to the process of painting, a projection screen at the same time for both visions and everyday life.

Raimar Stange describes in his essay “*Zum kritisch – politischen Aspekt von bewegter Farbe (Get Your Color Running: On the Critical, Political Aspect of Colour in Flux)*” the difference between implicit and explicit political art and how some artists no longer dictate how a painting is to be interpreted and admit a mere sensual-aesthetic appreciation, while other artists do not let allow of open interpretation to avoid misunderstanding. He quotes Umberto Eco in his lecture “The Open Work” (published in 1962), in which he discusses the possibilities offered by so-called open works characterised by a dynamic relationship to the viewer and by semantic polyvalence through such aspects as imperfection and concrete mobility. Eco considers works of the movement known as Art Informal

and Abstract Expressionism as “open works... because its signs combine like constellations whose structural relationships are not determined univocally, from the start”. And precisely this absence of definition has important consequences: the viewer can choose his own points of view. This opportunity to ‘choose’ which “tends to encourage acts of conscious freedom” is avoided in explicitly political art, about which the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre repeatedly emphasised the primacy of the conceptual, of ‘meaning’.

For example, in his action entitled *The Green Line* (2005, performed in Jerusalem), Francis Alys walked along the border between East and West Jerusalem, holding a can of paint. The can had a small hole, thus the artist left behind a trail of green paint as he walked. In comparison, Lynda Benglis also painted with her latex floor paint (1969), using a paint bucket with a hole in it inside different exhibition spaces. Her action was not, however, semantically charged.

So, without question, the context within which an action/painting takes place largely changes the content.

Please send me your ideas, concepts, documentation or manual instructions for painting in public spaces. I will collect them in a summary and will mention your name in connection with them, in case of any reproduction. silkekaestner@gmx.de. ■

Notes

- 1 Raimar Stange. “Get your Color Running – Zum kritisch-politischen Aspekt von bewegter Farbe [Get Your Colour Running: On the Critical, Political Aspect of Colour in Flux]”. In **Farbe im Fluss [Colour in Flux]** (Kerber Verlag, 2012, Bielefeld, Germany), p. 66.
- 2 Umberto Eco. **The Open Work**, (trans.) Anna Cancogni (Harvard University Press, 1989, Cambridge, MA), p. 86.



THE DIGITAL STATE OF A MOVING IMAGE/ THE MOVING STATE OF A DIGITAL IMAGE

Barbara Sirieix

Invisible Image

In his work *Angel* (2009), Mat Collishaw rephrases Fra Angelico's *Annunciation to Mary* by pixelating the Archangel Gabriel's silhouette onto a lenticular print. Among the many versions of the subject, Fra Angelico's is the barest, emphasising the presence of the invisible through the intensity of the composition of the two figures of Gabriel and Mary under the arches.

Boris Groys in his essay "Art Power" questions the status of the image in the context of advanced technologies. The digital image creates the illusion that there is no difference between the original and the copy because the original – the image file – is invisible: "The digital image is a visible copy of the invisible image file, of the invisible data. In this respect, the digital image is functioning as a Byzantine icon – as a visible copy of an invisible God". Nothing has more aura than that which is invisible. In the same way, Collishaw's work relates to the figuration of the invisible in art history within the invisible condition of the digital image. As the work is a copy of a copy of a masterpiece, it also refers directly to the question of the aura.

Contrary to Benjamin's expectations, technology has diversified both the conditions of reproduction and the resulting image. The image is now in a digital state, what Groys calls the era of digitalisation. An *October* magazine

symposium (Summer 2011) on digital experimental filmmaking illustrates the dichotomy between digital and analog practice as if it were an aesthetical debate like the one opposing David and Delacroix in the 19th century, line against colour. Yet the fact is that if an artist today chooses to use film or analog devices, there is a great chance that he will use digital technologies at some point (in editing and postproduction for instance); also, if he defends the use of analog, it is generally a reaction to the digital medium or to the 'spectacular' dimension of mainstream media images. Any image produced now is connected to the digital, for we are in the era of advanced technologies.

So what is the condition of the digital image? Hito Steyerl's essay, "In Defense of the Poor Image", elaborates a beautiful metaphor of a class struggle between images. They evolve within a hierarchy defined by their resolution, at the bottom of which is a new class of poor images. "*The poor image is a copy in motion*", as against the stillness and high definition of the rich image – an opposition Steyerl renders as a metaphor of the human condition in the

neoliberal era. The more the image is reproduced, the further its condition is pauperised, so that, without the Institution (conservation or copyright), the image is always merging towards the proletariat.

While Steyerl underlines the subversive power of the free flow of low-resolution pictures, Groys points out their tendency to non-identity and then advocates for the return of digital images back into the Museum. His argument is that since we assume that the original is invisible in a context of diversity, each visualisation of the image is an event where it is performed. Groys empowers the curator to this task, but we can consider this the condition of the image per se, and not intrinsic to its relation to the institution. This performativity in the process of the image's apparition becomes a frame of work for the artist.

The Monument of the Pixel

Mohamed Bourouissa's work reflects on this specific transient nature of the image. He won wide recognition with *Périphéries*, a series of photographs begun in 2006 in the suburbs of Paris.

He went on to the post-graduate film and new media programme at the Studio National des Arts Contemporains in Le Fresnoy, Tourcoing, where he began making films and working with 3D scanners. There he made *Temps mort* (2009), a film retracing a cell phone correspondence (via text messages and images shot with the phone camera) he had with a convict. He progressively abandoned 'rich images' for 'copies in motion', and developed projects on image construction in relation to the social fabric.

His latest project, *L'Utopie d'August Sander* (The Utopia of August Sander, 2011-2012), was developed in Marseille during a residency at Pôle Emploi, the French national employment agency. With August Sander's monumental photographic series, *People of the 20th Century*, as the starting point, Bourouissa turned to archiving the unemployed with the technology of 3D scanners and printers. The toy-size, polymer resin sculptures he achieved became a reverse version of the third century BCE Terracotta Army in China, built out of the "reserve army of labour" of images. The idea for him was "to bring to visibility people who are invisible in society" through the creation of these modest monuments. Why 3D prints instead of photographs? The 3D scanner gathers three images that are sent to the printer, who then reproduces this information through 2D

layers to form a sculpture. During the process, for technical and aesthetic reasons, Bourouissa decided to reduce the size of the file: these are not full definition prints. The result is a three-dimensional version of a pixellated picture: the silhouettes of the figurines are roughly shaped as blurred images cast in stone.

The project was also a platform to question the concept of labour and its value. What was Bourouissa's position as an artist who could potentially earn money through this project? How could he define his relation to precariousness in a structure claiming to be a social care programme but seeking to be a profitable organisation nonetheless? His project therefore functioned similarly, with employees providing products and services. Bourouissa later decided to go to illegal markets in Marseille and sell his sculptures for two Euros apiece,

with a hidden camera documenting the action. During the whole process, he tried to record the invisible potential: the unemployed persons' refusals to participate in the project (collected into a publication) and their reactions while in the act of buying art on the market (there was a lot of reaction to the idea of buying a person's image, considered sacrilegious by some Muslims).

It is interesting how Bourouissa created a system for producing objects out of 'images' as a way to make images performative. He kept questioning this process by bringing them outside the studio and the gallery space. At his exhibition at the Galerie Edouard Manet in Gennevilliers in September 2012, he developed a large-scale installation of 3D print machines, photographs, videos, objects, sketches and publications, which was another way of 'performing' them in an assemblage of diverse renderings of reality and temporality.

Digits and Numbers

The term 'digital' has a very poetic origin. The French decided to restrict the term *numérique* to refer to the nature of the information (numerical data) using the Latin root *numerus* (number), whereas all other Roman languages choose to use the Latin root *digitus* (finger) in the sense of 'using numerical digits', referring to the elementary apparatus with which to count up to 10. The result



is that it is very uncomfortable to speak about technology in French because there is always something that seems missing. The term 'digital' relates to its philosophical history from *tekne* to technology – before the invention of the computer – how man constructed a part of his history by developing extensions of his hand. It also evokes the intrinsic relationship of technology with the body.

The proliferation of digital artefacts in everyday life has shifted our perception of images and how we relate with our body to the digital. The more we tend to think about advanced technologies in terms of the immaterial, in particular the idea of immaterial labour, the more the technologies evolve towards an increasing 'digital' manipulation of them. Let's just think about the all-in-one PC generation, this new range of computers where the screen can be manipulated as well as the keyboard and, therefore, the images themselves. While it is relevant to talk about immateriality in the new forms of capitalism, it is questionable with technology, as what comes to mind is physical exhaustion, the production of a work on a computer and the actual material used to produce it (oil, silica, coltan, etc.).

The work of Shana Moulton focuses on the spiritual and physical discomfort we tend to feel in our society where happiness seems to



be a commodity one can purchase in the supermarket. The main character of her films, the artist's alter ego, Cynthia, is obsessed with wellbeing and is therefore a fantastic consumer of various new age commercial devices with which she experiments in her phantasmagorical adventures. The visual universe of Moulton is camp, filled with tacky, neon-coloured objects.

She works mainly with video and performance, often combining them as in the project *Whispering Pines*, a series of films that she began to perform live at one point. *Whispering Pines 10* involved an opera for several venues in collaboration with singer and curator Nick Hallet. During her performance, *SPF2012*, she interacts with elements in the video projection to elaborate the narratives. She places herself in front of the light beam of the projector, and then she acts as if the video was a decor, playing with elements in the images or adding real objects to the

film content. The editing is constructed around her expected interventions. Sometime she manipulates a mini-projector, producing astonishing formal effects of the juxtaposition of images and light.

The performance also evokes the relation between the body and the digital, through various references to the usage of computer technologies. The background image shifts from a decor to a Mac computer screen where the artist imitates manipulating applications, zooming or moving into the picture as if on an iPad, playing with the genie effect of the dock, or displacing objects like with Photoshop. The moving images turn into a kaleidoscopic experience of reshaping reality. The functional relationship between the body and technology is the field of ergonomics. The objects today seem to be disconnected from their primary function of being tools to relieve the body from physical labour or discomfort. They are no longer functional but representational in an absurd way. Ergonomics embedded with the marketing concept of wellbeing are symptomatic of the neo-liberal economy, and transform functionality into a product itself.

Deciphering the World

Neil Beloufa's last installation, *The Unforgettable Shots of Autonomy*, at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, reflects

the artist's capacity to bring together the parameters of vision in the digital state into a video installation. As we see things in HD, 3D, developing multiple points of view in synchronicity, literally and metaphorically, our thoughts and projections of the world shape themselves in the same way. We are shaped by our 'usages'. As in a permanent, large-scale 3D apparatus with a 5.1 sound system, perceptions tend to be multi-layered because the sources grow exponentially. Beloufa's installations mix, superimpose and confront video images with materials, fabrics, rubbish, objects, sculptures, precarious structures or architectures rendering this complexity.

The ambitious prospect of *The Unforgettable Shots of Autonomy* is to encompass all the different stages of production in a cyclical organic process. The set's decors were built in the Palais de Tokyo for the shooting of the three videos present in the installation, after which they were dismantled during a party organised by the artist. The moment of the party functions as a carnival in the traditional sense, where its role was to preserve social order by an ephemeral overturning of its structures during the fest. With the remains of the destroyed stages, Beloufa built the installation in which the videos are shown. The result is a phenomenally complex structure, with multi-layered partitions standing in

the middle of the place, shaping spaces and various precarious architectures. The decors are sometimes scenery that continues the video (for instance, in the film shot on a fake beach, we are seated on beach furniture). The central structure is an actual sculpture, suggesting both a shop design and an archaeological excavation. One can see showcases, but the glass is gridded, so we can only make out the silhouettes of the encased objects. They follow the process of museologisation, as contemporary commodities soon to become remains of a recent past, and as future fetishes for the museum.

This sort of display is along the lines of artists' necessity to perform their work without the work itself being an actual performance, in an urge to show the complexity of the experience of immediacy today. Ryan Trecartin also addresses the new world of media more directly, using a certain type of despicable imagery – from mediocre TV shows, unbearable American white trash programmes,

and cheap imageries from the Internet – in a sort of 'Bataillesque' process of transgression. The work focuses on the shifts involved in communication and language. The exhibition of the *Re'Search Wait'S* series built with Lizzie Fitch presents a powerful, surrealistic Ikea display section decor that the viewer experiences as a Uchronic vision of a 21st century section in a history museum. It is also a detour from the cinema display, shaping the mythical grotto of cinema into a pristine and insipid salon, the expression of global consumerism. Guy Debord reincarnated into the body of a television show presenter.

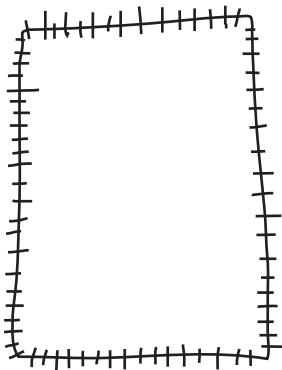
The audience of a cinematic work is no longer a motionless figure facing running photograms, but is a reactive body walking through it. His ability to see is determined by the light and his bodily movements to understand what he is seeing. The beam of the video projector determines the apparition of light, therefore the creation of meaning. Many artists are working with repositioning this question in the context of advanced technologies, within the frame of the moving image and live arts. The narratives are more complex; editing is now performing an assemblage of images and objects with light, space and movement. This construction process is necessary in the context of the invisibility of images, in order to recreate them. ■



A VISION OF WASTE

THE POLITICAL IMAGERY OF TENTS

Nandita Badami



In *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, James C. Scott argues that the state, as a site of formal organisation, can be thought through a visual metaphor. It strives constantly for everything to be neat, ordered, measured. Planning and regimes of making-visible are at the centre of its activity. In the opening paragraph of the first chapter, Scott explains this visual dimension to state practice:

Certain forms of knowledge and control require a narrowing of vision. The great advantage of such tunnel vision is that it brings into sharp focus certain limited aspects of an otherwise far more complex and unwieldy reality. This very simplification, in turn, makes the phenomenon at the center of the field of vision more legible and hence more susceptible to careful measurement and calculation. Combined with similar observations, an overall, aggregate, synoptic view of a selective reality is achieved, making possible a high degree of schematic knowledge, control, and manipulation.¹

More recently, Scott has supplemented this description of statist vision with his own kind of visual regime, what he refers to as “squinting like an anarchist”.² Perhaps he chooses the term ‘squint’ because it questions the aspirations to totality that we see in state-controlled vision. Squinting is a form of seeing that takes for granted unclearness, partialness of vision, dimness of light. Squinting as a metaphor for looking opens up different modes of visibility that destabilise the urge for comprehensive representation. It is based on access to fragments, it underlines the ability to see even

when conditions for sight are not optimum. When we squint, we reinforce our ability to make sense of a distorted field of vision; we squint because although we cannot make out the whole picture, we can make sense of a part. Invoking the squint as a mode of seeing is, for me, part of a larger project to turn away from the desire to represent totalities, in order to analyse events on their own terms.

My attempt to do this begins with an account of the use of parachutes in Ladakh. Ladakh is an area located in Jammu and Kashmir, where India shares borders with both China and Pakistan. Military presence asserts itself through signs, barbed wires, army vehicles, supply trucks, check-posts and gun-toting *jawans*. Forward posts are virtually uninhabitable in the winter, with whole areas being cut off from vehicular and pony traffic. In such a situation, the army negotiates the rugged and inhospitable terrain through what is inescapably a statist *visual mode*, perceiving and negotiating space *from above*, a literal manifestation of Scott's metaphor. It airdrops supplies – reportedly everything from food to fuel to cars – by using parachutes of different grades and sizes. The parachute, as a form, lends itself to seeing from above. It promotes a control over space and time, in that it facilitates military 'occupation', and military *preoccupations*.

The local *jawans* and porters become the starting point of a long and intricate supply chain in Ladakh, a chain that fundamentally alters the parachute form utilised by the state or the army, and repurposes it to fit the needs of the local Ladakhi. Ripped parachutes are collected and sold to civilian Ladakhis, brought either on pony or smuggled out of army compounds by truck drivers who transport them to various parts of the state.³ Locals repair and repurpose parachutes into tents, which are most often put into use in the aid of informal economic activity. Commonly, they are used to set up tea stalls in remote areas en route to popular tourist sites, or as shades to roadside restaurants. Like the army, parachutes also help the Ladakhis in the mediation of time and the occupation of space, insofar as they give

them the ability to negotiate their land, *occupy* it and fuel their livelihoods. If parachutes facilitate 'seeing like a state', and attempt to render geographies visible from a height, then tents '*lateralise*' vision. Instead of descending from a height with the assumption of full visual mastery, reminiscent of cinematic images, the tent is always already embedded in forms of life that do not *ascend*. If the parachute's field of vision recalls Paul Virilio's discussion of the links between war and cinema,⁴ 'seeing like a tent' is akin to the immersed, limited and embedded nature of amateur videos filmed from amidst crowds in public spaces.

The link between seeing, parachutes and cinema on the one hand, and squinting, tents and amateur video on the other, shares an affinity with the debates around cultures of the 'poor image',⁵ which emerges in direct opposition to the industrial, polished cinematic image. The poor image not only thrives quite literally on squints (as anyone who has seen a handycam version of the latest movie release well knows), but it also opens out into a practical realm of waste by referring to images that in terms of quality would never enter the formal domain of circulation.

Squinting allows us to see the productive, bustling potentialities of waste. To a formal, statist, aerial vision, the lines between waste and value are so clear that any spillage is impossible to imagine. Like the poor image, the tent is not just a *metaphor* for waste, but is a waste-object. It is only after the parachute has run its course as a productive commodity that it is re-appropriated within a waste economy. This repurposed waste object allows us to adopt a view that destabilises a host of social sciences assumptions around waste and value. These ambitious and somewhat speculative links between sight, economy and culture are crucial in entering the space that the tents of Ladakh allow us to think about. What I 'occupy' myself with in this piece, therefore, is not an anthropological account of tents and informal economies, but a set of speculations about the metaphorical and 'real' implications and virtues of partial sight.

The rest of this paper hopes to show how by squinting we can reveal geographies of the contemporary that aerial planning visions are often – to use a problematic word – ‘blind’ to. To explicate a squinted vision of the present, I will use the example of the parachutes/tents given above and try to show how the dichotomy between waste and value is largely a construct bequeathed to us by aerial, ‘capitalist’ forms of seeing. Once we discard the supremacy of vision and descend from our parachutes, we find that the tents in Ladakh are part of a complicated mediation between the occupying force of sovereign power and the ‘occupancy’ of common people who repurpose broken parachutes (waste) and infuse them with new value. Arguments of the kind I am suggesting also push for a continuum in place of the representation of distinct ‘sectors’ of the economy, and refuse to make the planner distinctions between formal/informal, authentic/pirate, etc.

Repurposing Waste

The phenomenon of ‘capitalist’ waste, not so uncommon in India or third world countries in general, is complicated by considering the informal repurposing of waste objects. Very simply, we can suggest that for an aerial, planner imaginary, the lines between ‘good objects’ (commodities) and ‘bad objects’ (waste) are drawn with clarity. The contemporary discourse on recycling attempts precisely to *formally* recapture waste objects and render them *back* into a commodity for the capitalist marketplace. However, in informal economies, hidden from the vision of policymakers, the distinctions between waste and value are consistently challenged. In this context, it should be said that there is a semantic distinction to be made between the words ‘object’ and ‘thing’. In a discussion of what he calls “Thing Theory”, Bill Brown remarks that we

begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks,

when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation.⁶

Foregrounding objects (things) that do not fulfil their ‘intended’ uses allows me to tap into a discourse that explores a difference between objects and things, a discourse based not only on their degrees of usefulness to us, but also on our affective relationships to them. Repurposed waste commodities specifically disrupt discourses of the production, distribution, exhibition and consumption of commodities – what in Brown’s language would be their intended “subject-object relation”. All the ‘things’ that Brown mentions are, in some sense, waste – a broken drill, a defective car, a dirty window. Although Brown’s examples all have an element of temporariness to them (that is, the ‘things’ may return to being ‘objects’ once more if fixed, repaired or cleaned), I wish to locate my analysis in spaces where ‘objects’ that are relegated to ‘things’ stay that way: in the so-called “wastelands of capital”.⁷

Waste is fundamentally a performative concept. Nothing is *inherently* waste – objects become so when we designate them as such. Capitalism functions through a cogent value/waste dichotomy; indeed, it might be argued that the notion of ‘value’ in capitalism can only be upheld in a context where there is a notion of ‘waste’. What happens to our convictions about capitalism if we reject thinking in the terms of this dichotomy?

For Vinay Gidwani, “waste is the specter that haunts value”.⁸ We can see this, for instance, in David Harvey’s work, where he argues that:

if value is interpreted as human labour in its social aspect under capitalism, then ‘not-value’ can be interpreted as human labour that has lost its social meaning owing to processes *that are also unique to capitalism*.⁹

Gidwani notes that Harvey is not positing *waste* as the negation of the concept of value. Instead, he coins the neologism ‘not-value’, and tellingly, understands this negative-form to lie *inside* capitalism. Gidwani critiques Harvey’s formulation for “remain[ing] in a binary and dependent relation to capital... It does not allow us to think of not-value as a prospective space of difference or alterity not contingent on the logic of capital”.¹⁰ While I agree with Gidwani’s critique of Harvey, I am appreciative of Harvey’s use of the term ‘not-value’. Whether or not it was his intention, by distinctly conceptualising “not-value” as lying within the ‘logic’ of capitalism, Harvey opens up a space through which we can distinguish between the “not-value” that is essential for the ‘logic of value’ to work within capitalism, and ‘waste’ as a category that, in Gidwani’s words, lies *outside* of that logic and is not contingent on it.

I would propose that certain labours of both of the *repair* and the repurposing of waste, as well as the *production* of waste, can be considered ‘outside’ this logic of capitalism that Harvey so ingeniously (if unintentionally) makes theoretical space for.

While thinking through the category of waste, I shall try to build a case for instances in which we can view waste as a space that *disrupts* the logic of capital. The not-value that is still within the system can be thought of as that which undergoes ‘re-commodification’, that is to say, capitalist value gets re-imbued into waste. My earlier gesture to capitalist enterprises of recycling, or the carbon credit economy, provides examples of this phenomenon at work. The interactions between individuals and waste-objects can however also be mapped in ways and spaces that are not governed by the operations of capitalist enterprise. There is

a distinction to be made between a recycling enterprise that is structured along capitalist lines and the refashioning of objects from waste on a smaller scale, as is often the practice in the ‘informal’ economy. The profit motive, common to both cases, is not enough to reduce their difference.

The Ladakhi tent enacts precisely these kinds of mediations between the formal and the informal, value and waste, capitalism and its outside, and military and civilian occupation. The *tent* is a repaired ‘thing’ in Brown’s sense – a parachute fixed and made ready for use again. The labour of repair, of turning an object of military use into a thing of civilian, everyday sustenance, is crucial to understanding how the intended trajectories of commodities can be reoriented. If the informal emerges, in this reading, as a waste economy in the specific sense described above, then those performing the labour of repair can be thought of as ‘waste people’ in contemporary cultures of production and consumption.

From Waste Objects to Waste People

The individual in the accumulation economy is the quintessential individual of (almost) all economic theory – abstract, ostensibly undefined by any social markers besides a proclivity to maximise profit and minimise pain and thereby act in a ‘rational’ manner. Individuals in the informal economy, on the other hand, are the ‘rejects’ of capital, made up of those who have been forcefully removed from their lands through processes of primitive accumulation, but not absorbed by capital in industrial jobs or other professions.

This category of ‘rejects’ is not to be confused with the concept of the reserve army of labour. The late Indian economist Kalyan Sanyal showed how, in postcolonial contexts, the “need economy” is populated by individuals who cannot be understood as the reserve army of labour, but something else: these individuals occupy a “wasteland”, a space outside of capitalist relations. Unlike the reserve army that is a casualty of the accumulation process, those in the wasteland are a category of people who have been

dispossessed from their land in the specific postcolonial context of primitive accumulation (which takes place in the present moment, not some historical transition period). These individuals are not within capital, they do not serve a function for capital as reserve army; they are, in effect, 'outside' capitalism, and have no prospect of being absorbed within it as such.¹¹

To call this category of people 'unemployed' would be to mask the fact that they occupy a space in which they are unable to produce as capitalist value their most basic (remaining) possession – their labour power. By no longer fitting into capitalist circuits of production and consumption, and having no hope of being absorbed back into these circuits, they are just as much produced as 'waste' as are waste-objects that have fallen out of capitalist circulation. Zygmunt Bauman has argued for a category of "human waste" or people that are produced as waste. These individuals help us to think of a *different* relationship between people and things that are not characterised by either production or consumption, precisely because the people in question are *neither producers nor consumers*:

In a society of producers, they are the people whose labour cannot be usefully deployed since all the goods that the existing and prospective demand is able to absorb may be produced, and produced more swiftly, profitably and 'economically', without keeping them in jobs. In a society of consumers, they are 'flawed consumers' – people lacking the money that would allow them to stretch the capacity of the consumer market, while they create another kind of demand to which the profit-oriented consumer industry cannot respond and which it cannot profitably 'colonize'. Consumers are the prime assets of consumer society; flawed consumers are its most irksome and costly liabilities.¹²

One could read Bauman's definition of *waste people* in conjunction with, say, images of Occupy Wall Street protesters. In this sense, perhaps the specifically postcolonial context of Sanyal's work can also be extended to the destabilisations that have taken place in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008. Indeed, simply on a visual register, the 'tent cities' that came up in the wake of the Occupy movements were criticised for creating an image of 'third-world shanty towns' amidst the cleanliness, order, neatness that normally characterise urbanism in developed nations.¹³

Although problematic in some senses, the comparison of the visual and material politics of Occupy to 'third-world shanty towns' does provide some insight into the overlaps between the informal tent economy of Ladakh and the communal tents of Occupy. In both cases, the tent becomes a thing that interrupts aerial visibility and lateralises vision. Part of the discomfort with Occupy and its use of tents has to do, therefore, with its mobilisation of an idiom of waste and dirt to counter the grid-like organisation of cities in the planner imaginary. Such a challenge to the dream of clean, ordered cities is mounted precisely by effecting what Solomon Benjamin calls "occupancy urbanism", thereby bringing the tent directly into confrontation with questions of property.¹⁴ Tents have similarly been mobilised in another part of the world – by Israelis – to pose questions to their state. Ariella Azoulay has argued that "for the Israeli regime, the tent is considered the natural home of Palestinians, their predicament, the essence of their very existence".¹⁵ Given this, the form that the Arab Spring protests took in Israel in the summer of 2011 was more radical than a simple mobilisation of waste and dirt to disrupt the city. The use of tents by Israelis, Azoulay has argued, was important because it played on the significance of tents in the local political imaginary. The protestors' use of tents, that symbol of Palestinian homelessness, brought attention to the destructive nature of Israel's policies – from blasting holes through the walls of Palestinian homes, to the devastation of the landscape – a destruction of both private

and public space, in the environmental as well as the political sense, on both sides of the wall.

Reoccupying Waste

The relationship between property and waste is an old one. Locke, for instance, equates the commons with ‘waste’, as lands being inefficiently used. He was possibly the first philosopher to mobilise the concept ‘waste’ in the context of property:

We see in commons, which remain so by compact, that it is the taking any part of what is common, and removing it out of the state nature leaves it in, which begins the property, without which the common is of no use [it is ‘waste’]. And the taking of this or that part does not depend on the express consent of all the commoners. Thus the grass my horse has bit, the turfs my servant has cut, and the ore I have digged in any place, where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property without assignation or consent of anybody. The labour was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, hath fixed my property in them.¹⁶

The paragraph quoted above is a well-known defence of bourgeois property rights, since the “grass my horse has bit, the turf my servant has cut” are all to be regarded as the private property of the ‘owner’, and not the servant. However, the fact that private property allowed for rational accumulation of wealth accruing from the land, over a period of time, prompts Locke to defend it, and thus is born the reasoning for the institutional edifice of capitalist value. Value here is thus equated with private property (that which is not commons). This conception of value (pitted against waste) goes on to shape both liberalism and capitalism and centrally informs our notions of consumption today.

Recently, however, philosopher Michel Serres has argued that the “originary” claim to property emerges *through* dirt: like animals, we first desecrate a piece of land to call it our own, and subsequently clean it up.¹⁷ Where Locke implicitly undertakes a ‘performance’ of waste – producing the commons as waste in order to then posit a notion of value in private property against it – Serres’ argument self-consciously plays on this understanding, in rendering literal the *performance* of waste as a form of asserting a right to property. Serres destabilises/inverts the classical understanding of the production of value to eradicate waste, to posit the production of waste to perform value. Serres’ reading of the production of waste as the originary claim to land lends itself to the reading of Occupy as producing waste as a way of staking its claims to foreclosed houses (which, ironically, are not precisely lying waste in the Lockean sense because they are, in their foreclosed state, contributing to capitalist value). Therefore, by mobilising the visual register of the informal (‘third-world shanty towns’), the occupiers were demanding for a different *regime* of value and waste that goes beyond the ‘not-value’ within the system: this is also a register on which, as we have seen, the repurposed Ladakh tents operate.

It is perhaps at this juncture that my invocation of squints, tents and waste comes together. The Lockean discourse on property is emblematic of Scott’s “seeing like a state”, a mode of vision that seeks to secure the boundaries of territories by making clear, individuated distinctions between who owns what. Squinting breaks with this regime and makes visible a subterranean zone of everyday existence where waste people working with waste objects re-infuse value to the ‘commons’. Scott calls this “infrapolitics”, which refers to “such acts as foot-dragging, poaching, pilfering, dissimulation, sabotage, desertion, absenteeism, squatting, and flight”.¹⁸ The quiet transformation of wasted army apparatus into a regular source of livelihood in a frontier region is a direct instantiation of this kind of infrapolitics.

The tents of Ladakh thicken existence on the ground and provide a different object-narrative for items associated with domination and the occupation of land. Similarly, Occupy's use of tents and dirt (of waste as a claim to property in Serres' sense) attempts to reclaim as *common* (as waste in Locke's discourse) what it sees as having been laid to waste within capitalism. Protest movements in Israel, too, seek to draw attention to the laying waste of land and property in the wake of a physically destructive Israeli state policy. If the contemporary moment lends itself to squinting through the open folds of a tent, our politics can be thought through the images it invokes on the ground, and the destabilisation of waste it leaves in its wake. ■

Notes

- 1 James C. Scott. **Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed** (Yale University Press, 1998, New Haven, CT), p. 11.
- 2 James C. Scott. **Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play** (Princeton University Press, 2012, Princeton N.J.).
- 3 I owe my knowledge of this supply chain activity to conversations with our driver and guide in Ladakh, who declined to be known by any other name than his last: Dorji.
- 4 Paul Virilio. **War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception** (Verso, 1989, London).
- 5 Hito Steyerl. "In Defense of the Poor Image". In **e-flux** 10 (November 2009). Available at: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/in-defense-of-the-poor-image> (last accessed 4 January 2013).
- 6 Bill Brown. "Thing Theory". In **Critical Inquiry** 28(1) (2001), p. 4.
- 7 Kalyan Sanyal. **Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-colonial Capitalism** (Routledge, 2007, London).
- 8 Vinay K. Gidwani. **Capital, Interrupted: Agrarian Development and the Politics of Work in India** (University of Minnesota Press, 2008, Minneapolis).
- 9 David Harvey, quoted in Gidwani, *ibid*.
- 10 *Ibid*.
- 11 Sanyal, *op. cit*.
- 12 Zygmunt Bauman. **Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts** (Polity, 2004, Oxford).
- 13 Emma Reynolds. "Occupy London Stock Exchange: MP's anger at St Paul's anti-capitalist camp". In **The Daily Mail**, 24 October 2011. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2052962/Occupy-London-Stock-Exchange-MPs-anger-St-Pauls-anti-capitalist-camp.html> (last accessed 4 January 2013).
- 14 Solomon Benjamin. "Occupancy Urbanism: Ten Theses". In **Sarai Reader 07: Frontiers** (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2007, Delhi), pp. 538-563.
- 15 Ariella Azoulay. "A Civil State of Emergency" photo essay. Available at: <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/918-a-civil-state-of-emergency-a-photoessay-by-ariella-azoulay> (last accessed 7 January 2013).
- 16 John Locke, quoted in Gidwani, *op. cit*.
- 17 Michel Serres. **Malfeasance: Appropriation through Pollution?** (Stanford University Press, 2011, Stanford, California).
- 18 Scott, **Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play**, *op. cit*.

V FOR WHAT?

ABOUT THE ACTUALITY OF WALTER BENJAMIN AND BERTOLT BRECHT FOR CONTEMPORARY ACTIVISM

Alexander Karschnia



Vfor Vendetta, as in the famous Wachowski Brothers movie that inspired activists worldwide? V for Victory? Or for Peace? Or V like the first novel by Thomas Pynchon? Or like V2 – the infamous Nazi rocket that inspired Pynchon for *Gravity's Rainbow*? The answer is: yes – all of these. V for Vendetta, Victory, Peace and as a Pynchon trope. All of these references will be used to talk about the actuality of Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht in times of crisis. And about contemporary activism and performance.

Imagine the statue of Bertolt Brecht in front of the Berlin Ensemble, wearing a V for *Vendetta* mask while someone hiding behind him holds up a hand, fore- and middle-fingers spread. Not to mock him, but to lend him an arm to indicate victory. And peace. Put the two together, and you get the outdated German word *Siegfrieden* (victorious peace). This was the declared aim of the military leadership in the First World War: peace through victory. History took a different turn, and Germany saw peace only after defeat – the kind of peace, in fact, that was to Brecht's liking. In his unfinished masterpiece, *Der Untergang des Egoisten Johann Fatzer* (*The Downfall of the Egoist Johann Fatzer*), he encourages the victor to quickly leave the site of victory, even to escape from the place of success:

Plunge back into the depths,
conqueror.
Jubilation enters where the fighting was.
Be no longer there.¹

This is the foremost lesson in Brecht: you can only learn by being defeated. (One could argue that this is exactly what did not happen after the First World War, otherwise there would not have been a Second.) *Fatzer* remained unfinished; after working on it for five years, Brecht stopped in 1931. Two years later, the Nazis took over state power, and he had to emigrate. In the following war, whose inevitability he clearly foresaw, the first rocket was shot into space: the A4 (short for *Aggregat-4*), also named the V2, V standing for *Vergeltung*

(vengeance), by the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels. A revenge-rocket, a *Wunderwaffe*, a miracle weapon that would turn the tide, bring a reversal of fortune and finally lead to peace-through-victory. But, once more, victory was on the other side, most prominently expressed in the outspread fore- and middle-fingers of Winston Churchill. Instead of *Siegfrieden*, Germany was brought to unconditional surrender. One of the consequences of this was military occupation by the Allied forces: the United States, Great Britain and France in the western part and the Soviet Union on the eastern side. Brecht chose the eastern side.

In East Berlin, Brecht was put in charge of the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, where he had celebrated his greatest success with *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*) in 1928. The enthusiastic reception that greeted the musical had been short-lived; as the dramatist Heiner Müller once joked, Hitler saved Brecht – from commercial success. The Great Depression and the subsequent rise of the Nazi movement dramatically altered Brecht's work; his most radical productions, the *Lehrstücke* (learning plays), were written in this period. It was also the time when Brecht and Benjamin started their collaboration,² an association that Hannah Arendt would later describe as “unique in that here the greatest living poet in Germany met the most important critic of the time, a fact both were fully aware of”.³ Arendt was one of the very few to describe their friendship in positive terms. Most of Benjamin's friends and colleagues, from Gershom Scholem in Jerusalem to Theodor Adorno and other members of the Institute of Social Research, were highly suspicious of the pair. This also affected the way Adorno and Scholem edited Benjamin's oeuvre, grossly underestimating Brecht's significance to Benjamin, who saw in him the unexpected appearance of a writer who was modern without reserve, radically committing himself to his time without illusion. Their mutual preoccupations included not only their shared political agenda, but also the way it expressed itself: “The tendency of a work of literature can be politically correct only if it is also correct in the literary sense. That means that the tendency which is politically correct includes a literary tendency”.⁴ Commitment alone would not do.

Brecht was a revolutionary cultural worker, not in the sense of a theatre-maker with revolutionary convictions, but as a revolutionising artist whose works were undermining the way cultural production was organised. His work was an elemental force, just like living labour in the factory system as described by Karl Marx.⁵ His aim was nothing less than the “total turnover” of the apparatus of production; he wanted to bring the cultural industry of state-theatres to a point of crisis. Rejecting the gourmet pleasures of “culinary theatre”, as he called it, Brecht aimed at making his productions indigestible. Theatres were drug-dealers, he declared, peddling the opium of false consciousness and ideology; the “smashing of ideology” was his stated goal. With such being their stance, Brecht and Benjamin came into opposition with most writers organised in the Communist party. This became obvious in the failure of *Krise und Kritik* (*Crisis and Critique*), their attempt at launching a magazine of Left-wing intellectuals to intervene in the political situation. Not one issue was ever printed, but the project was the most important intellectual initiative of the time. Its title was its programme: to discover or precipitate crisis by means of criticism. One of the texts Brecht proposed for the first issue was called “Welcoming the Crisis”;⁶ for him, politics was but “a continuation of critical practice by other means”.⁷ What he wrote about the crisis in 1931 seems actualised today in an almost uncanny way:

The universally accessible fact that there are crises (of mathematics, medicine, foreign trade, marriage, etc.) leads to the realisation of the great global, all-embracing crisis, whose often only momentary appearances, each seemingly independent of all its other manifestations, often prevent such a realisation.⁸



Thus, the crisis is seen not as an end, but as a turning point (such as happens during an illness), in which things come to the surface that have been invisible before. The result is either a cure (*Heilung*, healing) or death. In Germany, the healing was death: “*Heil Hitler!*” was the equivalent of the slogan of Spanish fascism, “*¡Viva la Muerte!* (Long live death!)” Brecht, Benjamin and all the writers they wanted to work with were forced into exile; many did not survive the war. Benjamin himself committed suicide in 1940 while fleeing Germany through the Spanish mountains. Brecht heard of it only a year later, after his arrival in the United States. Together with the news of Benjamin’s death, he received the manuscript of his last completed work, the essay, “*Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (On the Concept of History)”. In its sixth thesis, Benjamin concludes: “Not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious”.⁹ The essay’s theses have not lost any of their actuality, but it is an actuality intertwined with the past. There is a secret appointment between the generations of the past and our own, as Benjamin said. Our task is “to brush history against the grain”,¹⁰ to “explode the continuum of history”.¹¹ The goal: to enter into a new constellation with past events. To be able to quote the past. This is what V does in the movie, *V for Vendetta*.

Set in the future, *V for Vendetta* takes place in a fictional fascist regime in Great Britain. After acts of terrorism and a terrible plague, a new order is being installed. V is an avenger, a terrorist, an individual anarchist who eventually brings down this order. He wears a mask because he is a victim – V for victim? – of medical experiments that the regime undertook on sections of the population. V eliminates everyone involved in these, including even the fascist dictator. The story ends with his death, but instead of revealing who V really is, the people all turn into V by wearing his mask, his hat and his dark coat, and march towards the British parliament. V meanwhile is buried in an underground chamber full of dynamite and set to detonate Westminster Palace: reVolution. The historical reference that V operates on is of the Gunpowder Plot of Elizabethan England, when Guy Fawkes, a Catholic (counter-)revolutionary, tried unsuccessfully to blow up Parliament on 5 November 1605, the date V picks to launch his action. He manages to infiltrate the public broadcaster and activates a state-of-emergency channel to commemorate Fawkes’ deed as a heroic act, a wake-up call. A year later, his mission is accomplished.

V has become a symbol for revolution: the bombing of the British parliament is seen as an attack not against a democratic institution, but against the ‘fortress of representation’. This is the sentiment expressed in the mass-masking of V. It resonates, in a strange way, with Brecht’s poems and plays in the time of crisis in which revolutionaries, but also normal city-dwellers, are told to delete their faces, to efface themselves, to become anonymous. The uncanny quality of these metaphors is that they anticipated a reality which became true only a few years later – in exile. As Heiner Müller once said: “The actuality of art is tomorrow”.¹²

Is it possible that today is this tomorrow? Have Brecht’s images of effacement, of escaping the place of success, of embracing defeat been actualised as a new political strategy, an anti-representational strategy? This strategy is shared by the different social movements of today – from Tahrir Square to Liberty Park on Wall Street – but is also discernible in the initiative that film- and theatre-maker Christoph Schlingensiefel started during the German federal elections of 1998.¹³ “Virtual revolutionaries” was Benjamin’s description of Brecht’s “great asocials”, Fatzer, Baal and Mackie Messer; this resonates with today’s ‘virtual revolutions’ in Tunisia and Egypt, whose uprisings were often labelled ‘Facebook revolutions’. For a certain time, an Egyptian Google Inc. marketing manager was made into the public face of the revolution. But isn’t the strength of these movements exactly in the effacing of their protagonists, that they are “revolutions of persons”, as Spanish activists have called them.



“*Wir sind das Volk* (We are the people)”, shouted East Germany in 1989, just before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Translating the word *Volk* into English is tricky, since the English word ‘people’ means both ‘populace’ and ‘persons’, which the German word doesn’t.¹⁴ The political party Christoph Schlingensiefel founded in 1998 was supposed to be based on persons alone: “Vote yourself, we know how to do it!” The clou was that the law allows individuals to run for office without a party – all you need to become a candidate is 200 signatures of people in your area. Schlingensiefel propagated: ‘*Du bist 1 Volk*’ – you are 1 V!” Like in Spain today, this V means persons – not public persons, but also not private persons. (How could you be private in a mass of millions?) It is rather ‘common persons’, in a very strong sense of ‘common’ as a new, third space between public and private. Maybe even as the key concept of all new social movements: ‘common cause’, maybe even ‘commonist’?

This brings us back to Fatzer, rather to his antagonist Koch, later called Keuner. The name derives from the Greek word *koinos*, which means ‘common man’. Who is, as Benjamin writes, a leader. And a thinker. But thinking, as Brecht and Benjamin always pointed out, is a collective practice. Thinking is the common! Mr Keuner is very lazy, so lazy that he has to be carried on to stage. This is exactly the attitude that Brecht wanted from his audience: cold-blooded, relaxed experts. Thus Brecht urged his actors and actresses not to identify themselves with their roles, but to des-identify: no *Einfühlung* (empathy), but *Ausföhlung* (ex-pathy). To put a distance in-between: between actor and role, but also between audience and figure. This distancing device is called *Verfremdungseffekt*, abbreviated as V-Effekt. V for *Verfremdung*! Which in English means ‘alienation’ or ‘estrangement’. But this is not the *Entfremdung* (alienation) of the producers from the product that Marx had analysed, but an artificial device to change the appearance of well-known phenomena into those of lesser-known ones, making the familiar strange, more distant, in order to recognise the misuse behind the use, the exception behind the rule, the artificiality behind the naturalness. Benjamin and later Roland Barthes wrote that this V of *Verfremdung* was an effect of writing. Just as letters, especially the characters, ‘types’ of a typewriter, need blank spaces between them, an actor/actress has to ‘write’ on stage in a very literal sense. The epic actor “must be able to space his gestures as in the way the compositor produces spaced type”.¹⁵ The singular gesture is the material with which an actor/actress works: “The more frequently we interrupt someone engaged in an action, the more gestures we obtain. Hence the interrupting of action is one of the principal concerns of epic theater”.¹⁶ Thus V is like an intervention, an interVening V, just like the mark for the insertion of words in a sentence. The V as graphic sign is a symbol for splitting or for opening up a gap, a fissure. It is a deVice to produce distance, an interruption or interVal. An insert: ctrl+V: quote. The goal: “to make gestures quotable”.¹⁷ The epic actor/actress has to put her gestures in quotation marks: V, like the fingers that accompany a word or a sentence with a certain gesture to mark it as a quote, to distance the speaker from the spoken. This Brechtian technique has to be radicalised and generalised for making political art. As theatre-scientist Hans-Thies Lehmann wrote: “Political theatre is the interruption of the political”.¹⁸ Thus a performance “is never limited to a certain message, but is always already something else”, less or more, double – just like the actor or the actress on stage who is supposed to show (a role) and to show (the act of) showing: *Verfremdung* as *Verdopplung* (doubling). Becoming identical with the political process corresponds in a twisted way to the mere onlooker, the Voyeur. Art, theatre or performance is something different; it is the third space between passive watching and acting (in an activist sense). It is the space that opens up like – a V. It never fully actualises itself, but always remains virtual. It is the re of revolution, the re-turn, the escape from the site of success, the embracing of failure. As Benjamin wrote in “On the Concept of History”, empathy, *Einfühlung*, is wrong, because with whom does one empathise? “Irrefutably with the victor. Those who currently rule are however the heirs of all



those who have ever been victorious. Empathy with the victors thus comes to benefit the current rulers every time. This says quite enough to the historical materialist".¹⁹ The practice of quoting as a means of exploding the continuum of history, of brushing history against the grain, is always an act of violence (V for violence), of ripping something out of one context and putting it into another. Only in a free, liberated, resurrected society would no violence be needed; all moments of history would be at the hands of humanity. Thus Benjamin and Brecht dreamt of artworks composed completely out of quotes. Which proves Lyotard's paradox of postmodernity that one has to be postmodern in order to become modern. "We have never been postmodern".

Brecht was hoping that the radio could be revolutionised in a way that would transform it from an apparatus of distribution to one of communication. Accordingly, he tried to revolutionise the way of theatre-making. In his conception of the *Lehrstücke*, he performs a Copernican turn: he topples the view of theatre that was centred on the relationship between actors acting on stage and an audience watching them. He even proposed to kick the audience out since it is the actors who are the ones learning, not the audience! This radical conception was called *Lehrstücke* (teaching play), but because of the emphasis on the act of learning, Brecht himself translated it into 'learning play'. The audience is only allowed in if they are of any use to the actors. This notion radically undermines the differentiation of teaching and learning in order to transform it into a process that takes place simultaneously: learning (and teaching) by doing: performing. There is no longer a message being delivered from a teacher to a pupil, but a continuous process that works both ways. It is a sabotage of the principle of representation.

And that's why it had to be stopped. The experiment had to end. It was ended from the outside, with the rise of a fascist regime. The German parliament was set on fire in an individual act by the Dutch anarchist, Marinus van der Lubbe, but instead of waking up the people, as happens in *V for Vendetta*, the incident was eventually used by the Nazis to install a dictatorship. When Brecht heard the news, he left Germany immediately. When he returned 15 years later, he could not continue where he had stopped. Instead, he had to rebuild German theatre out of ruins. But in the meantime, he had also changed his theory. Now he announced that the focus was no longer on the process of representing, but on that which was being represented – one step forward, two steps back (as Lenin would have it).

Today's theatre-practice requires more than Brecht's non-Aristotelian dramaturgy; its call is rather for a post-Aristotelian one that always begins in the middle: everything starts from there. No more beginning, middle and end, only middle. Brecht was unwilling to go that far. So in the end, he remained in the frame of Aristotle; he was not ready to sacrifice the story, fable or parable. He defended the parable principle in the exact moment it came to an end, according to Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow*, translated in German as *Die Enden der Parabel* (*The End of Parables*). Pynchon's parable is the line of flight of the V2 rocket. It is called the Blitz since it hits the ground before you can hear it. Since then, the order of cause and effect is lost. Maybe Brecht was aware of it, thus he defended it. In a terrible way, it is the rocket that brushes history against the grain, that literally explodes the continuum of history.

P.S. In New York, the police prohibited the Wall Street occupiers from using technical equipment, loud speakers or other electrical amplifiers (in German, *Verstärker*). Thus the group started to amplify themselves by repeating the words of the speakers in a chorus: the so called 'human (or people's) mic', the *Verstärker-Effekt*. Along with this choir went hand signs that enabled the gathering, general assembly or Spanish *asamblea*, to communicate on a horizontal level and to make collective decisions in a radically democratic way. The similarity to Brecht's learning-play practice and radio theory is striking: Brecht envisioned

putting the listeners in contact with the learned choir of his plays, or broadcasting to the public the counselling of the people involved in the plays, which he called “*meetingähnliche Kollektivveranstaltungen*”:²⁰ meeting-like collective events. Sounds like a fit description for an *asamblea*. Or the other way around: the *asamblea* as model for learning play? The ‘people’s mic’ produces for the participants a strong V-Effect – from *Verstärker*, ‘amplifier’ – but also *Verfremdung*, ‘alienation’, in the original Brechtian sense: the separation of elements, the showing of the showing as well as the displaying of an attitude, a commentary. The people that constitute the ‘people’s mic’ are simultaneously listening, repeating and commenting via gestures, either agreeing with what is said, disagreeing or simply passing it on. While from the outside the ‘people’s mic’ might look like the old model of the preacher preaching to the converted, it is a new model of communication, a multi-voiced choir that could be described as epic in the Brechtian sense. At the same time, it follows a post-Aristotelian dramaturgy, since it is no longer a process of linear representation from production to reception, but it begins and ends in the middle. The choir is a form of live media which is no longer a tool or instrument, a means for an end, but what Benjamin has described as “pure means”: it is part of the production of sociality. It is a Great Education Council – *ein Großes Pädagogium* – as Brecht envisioned in *Fatzer*. By repeating words, copying gestures, testing different attitudes, the people are learning. Thus the theatre is transforming into what Benjamin called a “laboratory of versatility”: V for versatility. ■

Notes

- 1 This part of the fragment was published by Brecht in his **Versuche [Trials]**, under the title, “Fatzer Komm (Fatzer Come)”. Compare Walter Benjamin, “From the Brecht Commentary”, in **Versuche über Brecht [Understanding Brecht]**, introduced by Stanley Mitchell (Verso, 2003, New York), p. 29.
- 2 Benjamin had unsuccessfully tried to make Brecht’s acquaintance five years previously. Convinced of the “actuality of a radical communism”, he had abandoned his academic career to dedicate himself to literary criticism. See Walter Benjamin to Gershom Scholem, 7 July 1924, in (eds.) Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem, **The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940** (Chicago University Press, 1994, Chicago), p. 245.
- 3 Hannah Arendt, introduction. “Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940”. In Walter Benjamin, (ed.) Hannah Arendt, **Illuminations: Essays and Reflections** (Schocken, 2007, New York), p. 14.
- 4 Benjamin. “Der Autor als Produzent [The Author as Producer]”. In **Understanding Brecht**, op. cit., p. 86.
- 5 *Living labour*, recently much discussed in the context of the postoperaist theories of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, has been defined as “collective creativity by creativity”. See (eds.) Geert Lovink and Trebor Scholz, **The Art of Free Cooperation** (Autonomedia/Institute for Distributed Creativity, 2007, Amsterdam).
- 6 Walter Benjamin Archive Ts 2475. See Erdmut Wizisla, **Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht: The Story of a Friendship** (Yale University Press, 2009, New Haven, Conn.), p. 77.
- 7 Bertolt Brecht Archive 332/49. See Wizisla, *ibid.*, p. 80.

- 8 "Die jedermann zugängliche Tatsache dass es Krisen (der Mathematik, Medizin, Außenhandels etc. usw.) gibt, führt nicht ohne weiteres zu der Erkenntnis der großen umfassenden Krise deren oft nur momentane (auftauchende und wieder verschwindende) scheinbar voneinander unabhängige Erscheinungsformen diese Krisen sind, ja, diese Tatsache verhindert sogar oft jene Erkenntnis" (translation by A.K.).
- 9 Benjamin. "Über den Begriff der Geschichte [On the Concept of History]", Thesis VI. Translations of Benjamin's historical-philosophical theses are available online at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm> (last accessed: 22 January 2013).
- 10 Ibid., Thesis VII.
- 11 Ibid., Thesis XVI.
- 12 Heiner Müller. **Anatomie Titus: Fall of Rome: Ein Shakespearekommentar [Anatomy Titus: Fall of Rome: A Shakespeare Commentary]**, (trans.) Carl Weber (PAJ Publications, 2012, New York).
- 13 1998 was the year of Brecht's centenary and the year in which, after many years, the learning play **Die Maßnahme [The Measures Taken]** was finally brought to stage. It is Brecht's most controversial work since it seems to affirm – just like *Fatzer* – the elimination of a young activist by his own comrades. Once again, Brecht had anticipated the course of events: just a few years later, the 'Great Terror' began in the Soviet Union.
- 14 The excessive use the Nazis made of the word *volk* led Brecht to the conclusion that it should be dropped, he was only speaking of the populace, the *Bevölkerung*.
- 15 Benjamin. "Was ist episches Theater? [What is Epic Theatre?]" (second version). In **Understanding Brecht**, op. cit. p. 19.
- 16 Ibid., p. 3.
- 17 Ibid., p. 11.
- 18 Hans-Thies Lehmann. "Wie politisch ist das postdramatische Theater? [How Political is Post-Dramatic Theatre?]" In **Das Politische Schreiben [Political Writings]** (Alexander Verlag, 2002, Berlin), pp. 11-21.
- 19 Benjamin. "On the Concept of History", Thesis VII, op. cit.
- 20 Brecht. "Der Rundfunk als Kommunikationsapparat [The Radio as Communication Apparatus]. In (eds.) Werner Hecht et al., **Werke: Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe [Works: Large Annotated Berlin and Frankfurt Edition]**, Vol. 21 (Aufbau/Suhrkamp, 1992, Berlin, Frankfurt), pp. 552-557, here p. 556.



PROJECTION AND URBAN GLUING

Thomas Mical

From Plato's proto-cinematic allegory of the cave to the modern cinema as building type, reflection and projection have turned inwards. Let us reverse this and nominate the cinematic trope of projection as the means to investigate what will come to displace continuity in urban architecture. Projection, as concept, is spatial and sensual and manifold. The historical source of projection is the theorised cinematic apparatus, which gives the projection of fantasies and lifestyles under the scaffolding of perspectival ideology. The cinematic apparatus, like the machine for living, are historical siblings that intertwine and resonate throughout the discourse of modern architecture into the hypermodern present. There are other, less legible aspects of projection that take place

in architecture and urbanism. There are also other, subtle and oblique, aspects outside the obvious cone of the light projection system of early film apparatuses.

The complex relationship between the ideology and modernist allure of the cinematic apparatus (as object of projection) and the recognition of the indeterminate and fugitive play of mobile-sections (as sense of displacement) is itself a powerful and appropriate model of urban hypermodernity, if we agree that the cinema-architecture relation operates beneath appearance or sensation as a shared conceptual terrain. Certainly there are productive difficulties involved in reading the city cinematically – for example, the question of what of architecture or urbanism cannot be filmed? But if we

look more closely at the construct of projection, the industrial production of film, like architecture, can be read at an abstract level as the attempt to fix a precise relation between technology, desire and material practice through visions of the imaginary.

It is the movement-sensation couple that optically plays itself out in the increasing convergence of city and its media image. This convergence operates within singular films as the lure of continuity, and in singular cities as the lure of identity. What is often overlooked is that filmic projection involves a great many shots and scenes shot separately and often out of sequence, but it is well known that they are brought together in considered and deliberate means (from montage theory to increasingly diverse contemporary

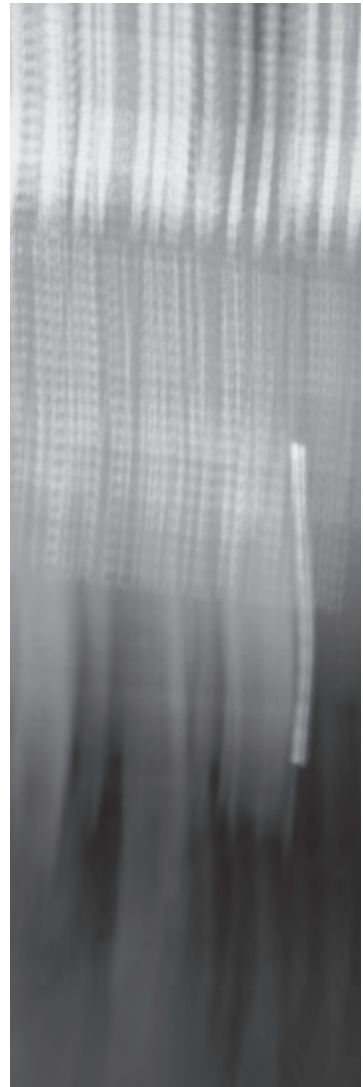
edits and cuts) to promote this lure of continuity. Continuity within a film parallels sense but overlooks the vicissitudes of identity.

The pocked and mottled spaces of the heterogeneous fabric of buildings and voids within cities resist continuity – the production of space in the late modern era facilitates this. This irregularity of occurrence of urban architectural facts – neither smooth nor striated but holey – are often glossed into a singular imaginary continuum, in a variety of urban discourses, in the language of continuity in cinema. Continuity, it must be recalled, in architectural theory is a much more complex entity to perceive, or to construct.

The processes of design are under extreme variations of degrees of fidelity to historical process and urban influence, as wilful autonomy is easiest. The urban architects who have engaged continuity as a design parameter must often work beyond the site boundaries, so as to project a certain vision of coherence outwards. This architectural projection is related to Baudry's apparatus theory, and also duplicates at a smaller scale across invisible political-property lines the problem of (urban) continuity. The connection of discontinuous spatial propositions is a type of continuity editing that we shall see lends itself to a scenographic imagination.

Cinema and urbanism share an affinity for this mode of representation. The scenographic imagination of the visionary architect fixes narratives of space and event into an expansive and diffusive scenography, a vision that exceeds and moves beyond the mediating frame of that image. The responsiveness and resistance of urbanism to this scenographic imagination is a suspicion of continuity, like seeing a widescreen image or panoramic photography and extending the vision beyond the diegetic register into the implied spectral spaces (Bazin) immediately beyond the frame. In these situations, the excess is the spatial identity. This excess is also, significantly, an invisible type of projection.

The compelling *Code 46* is famous for its mash-up of scenes from diverse global cities that are represented as a singularity, and this singularity tends towards a cold but subtle cyborg urbanism, no longer flickering digital architecture but perfect media-streaming façades and surfaces. What is projected in this coupling is not the conventional 'sutured' optical subject of cinematic modernity, but the appearance of a phantasmal urbanism, an imaginary urbanism that diffuses across individual architectural projections, a panoramic imaginary created by a forced continuity between autonomous elements that are



projected from the process of selection and combining of contemporary recombinatory urbanism, fusing cinematic and urban processes and reception. In considering the elements of the city under globalisation as generic architectural prototypes, *Code 46* and the futuristic film genre productions are increasingly re-presenting contemporary buildings and spaces re-mixed AS the future. The fusion of discrete present-as-future projects into a fictive singularity in film shows us how architecture in globalisation is expected to perform, and the resulting generic architectural prototypes tend towards expressive multiplicity as they are dispersed into every city. The production of this smooth space that anneals the prototype-scenes into a fictive global continuity can be seen in specific examples in Delhi, in a variety of new clusters of mixed-programme projects, but perhaps no more spectacularly than in the fringe micro-metropolis of Gurgaon.

Let us now cut to the consequence of the subtle cyborg. As we grow accustomed to technological implants, mediation, and projection, post-humanist cyborg theory becomes ordinary and everyday. Not only will the habit require greater doses of intrusive technology to even recognise the cyborg present, the hastening of instrumentalisation of desires makes continuity itself undesirable in lived

experience. Take for example the genre of sci-fi films depicting cyborg urbanism. From *Blade Runner* (1983) to *Total Recall* (2012), the structure and appearance of these cinematic cities are composed of discrete buildings and architectural situations, hybrids of machines, imaging, models and some live sets united by camera movements and editing. Buildings are increasingly becoming sentient, sensing and interpreting, emerging as a new type of companion species with organic materials and organic processes integrated into their designs, often surreptitiously.

If we examine the historical urban block of architecture, from the ancients to the present day, we can see in Gurgaon (and other emerging high-density interventions) that the urban block building is being transformed into something quite different, something that fuses programmes, structure, advertising and a whole range of technologies into scenographic structures. No longer insula/islands, or beads in an urban fabric, the new urban architectural prototypes vary as their human-technological interfaces vary, but taken haptically these details are expressed and recur repeatedly with infinite similarity at the micro-scale. The macro-scale recombinant urbanism requires a degree of spatial continuity, infrastructure continuity, social cohesion and, certainly, a design

strategy that laminates autonomous buildings and zones with conceptual and spatial 'stickiness'. This spatial stickiness seen cinematically is a conceptual editing or joining process; seen architecturally, it is the projection of the design beyond the site boundary into extending a spatial dialogue with the adjacent designs. So it would follow that the recombinant urbanism of global cities, constructed from cyborg buildings, requires a range of sticky edits to become panoramic and singular. Consequently, the range of techniques of editing is of particular importance in considering the cinematic impulse present in architectural visions. Architects can benefit from analysis of the combinatorial logic of what Eisenstein called in his montage theory film-phrases, individual scenes, which when combined with attention to the larger sequences operating above and through them, can produce a wide range of emotional and intellectual and political ramifications simply through editing as sorting or rational combination. To look at the cinematic city, or the city as city cinematically, what is missing now in cases like Gurgaon is an analogue for the role of editing in cinema, specifically the gluing of discrete scenes, and even more crucially, to identify the implicit rules and cultural codes that support the arresting tendency of contemporary cinema to make

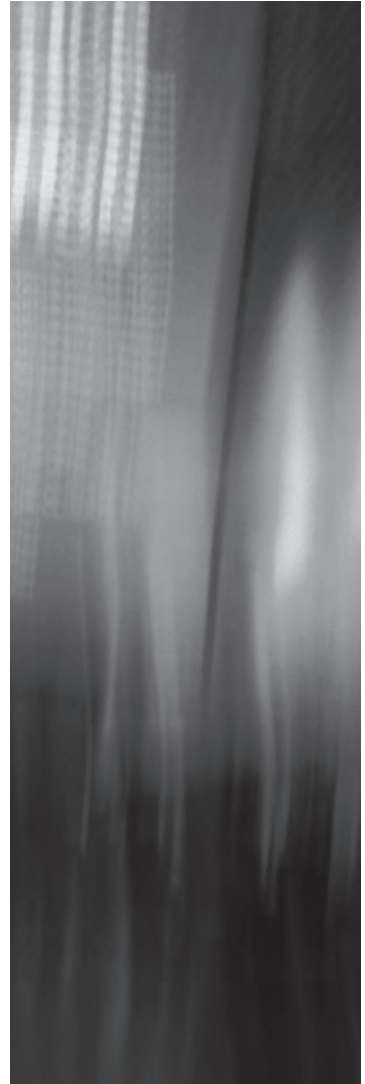
diverse 'mobile-sections' sticky and resonant, laminated under a larger scenographic imagination, which itself must necessarily presuppose a certain degree of mobility (and cyborg globalisation).

The process of joining stick 'mobile-sections' is a necessary analogue for thinking and deciding the place of architecture, determined at the level of sensing and anticipating effect. Gluing/editing offers a wide variety of visual and conceptual tools that allow for infinite variations of spatial displacement within the continuity of a singular visual movement-image, and more so at the large scale of cinematic production. If the film-phrase can stand for the architectural project, the city is a film of these. But the building is composed of multiple designed and improvised narratives and mobile-sections of experiences, and the city can never be reduced to a single film, not even a fixed cinematic sequence. To be precise, the cinematic city is more accurately a spatialised network of mobile-sections, intersecting, fusing and uncoiling across and through territories.

Interruptions to this congealing of recombinant urbanism for a higher continuity include irregular seams, edges, gaps, crevices, faultlines, alien spaces, missing components, dead zones, stealth landscapes and a whole range of visible and invisible boundaries.

The myriad cinematic techniques for continuity editing, nonlinear editing and for gluing mobile-sections can and should allow us to think anew the importance of these seams, edges, gaps and boundaries as the editing opportunity – what is the architectural analogue of a dissolve? Of a fade? Of a jump cut? Of a wipe? So the architect has to imagine urban projections that stick – this is the desirable open-ended method for fusing apparatus-driven urban continuity with the sensed urbanism of mobile-sections. These operations and procedures, in their entirety, stake out the process of spatialising cinematic editing as urban gluing, and this work is a small sketch towards a theory of urban gluing.

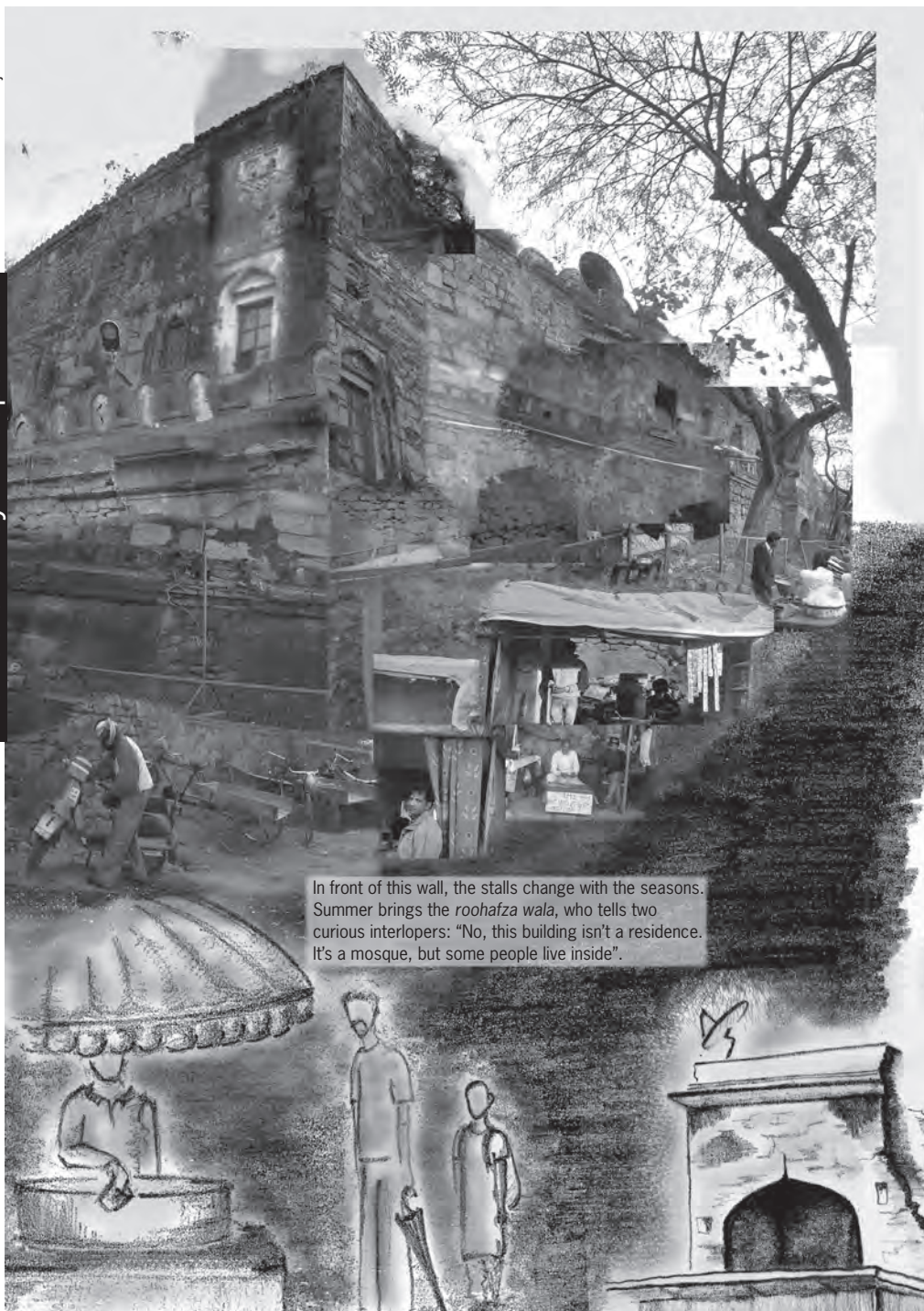
The urban milieu that is created by generic urban prototype buildings loosely tethered to hard and soft infrastructural urbanism can host a great many insightful and improvised connective edits. If we follow the logic of this quick analysis of the fictive connectedness within the filmic-urban coupling, new hybrid spaces and movements could arise. The whole range of continuity and nonlinear edits are potential techniques of gluing recombinant architectural propositions into a cinematic code of urban experience, and like cyborg urbanism, the more the technology drives the gluing-hybridising interface, the more normative it will become. ■



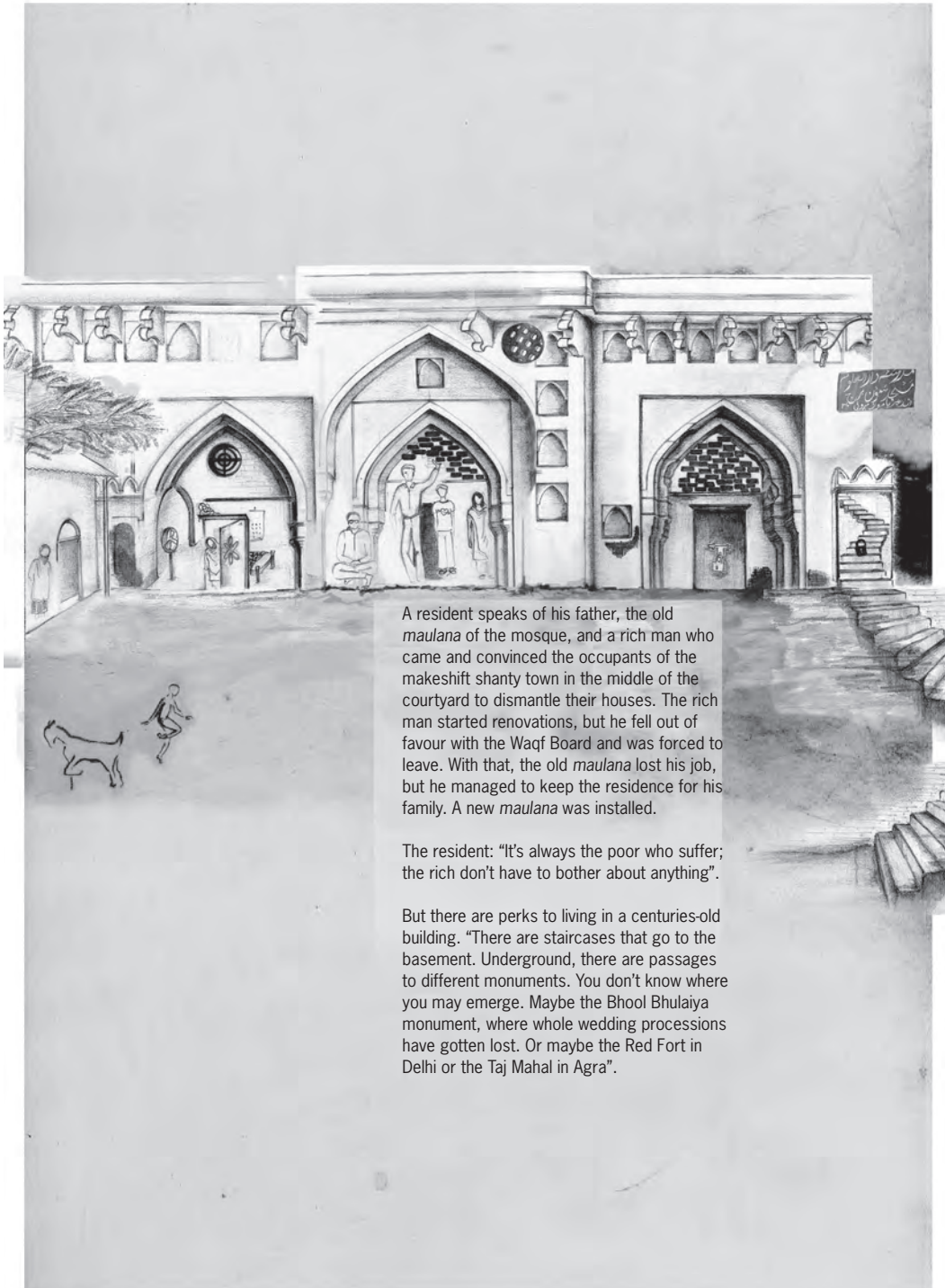
NOT WRITTEN IN STONE

Thomas Crowley + Deepani Seth

With inputs from
Vandita Sharma + Chiranjeev Borah



In front of this wall, the stalls change with the seasons. Summer brings the *roohafza wala*, who tells two curious interlopers: "No, this building isn't a residence. It's a mosque, but some people live inside".



A resident speaks of his father, the old *maulana* of the mosque, and a rich man who came and convinced the occupants of the makeshift shanty town in the middle of the courtyard to dismantle their houses. The rich man started renovations, but he fell out of favour with the Waqf Board and was forced to leave. With that, the old *maulana* lost his job, but he managed to keep the residence for his family. A new *maulana* was installed.

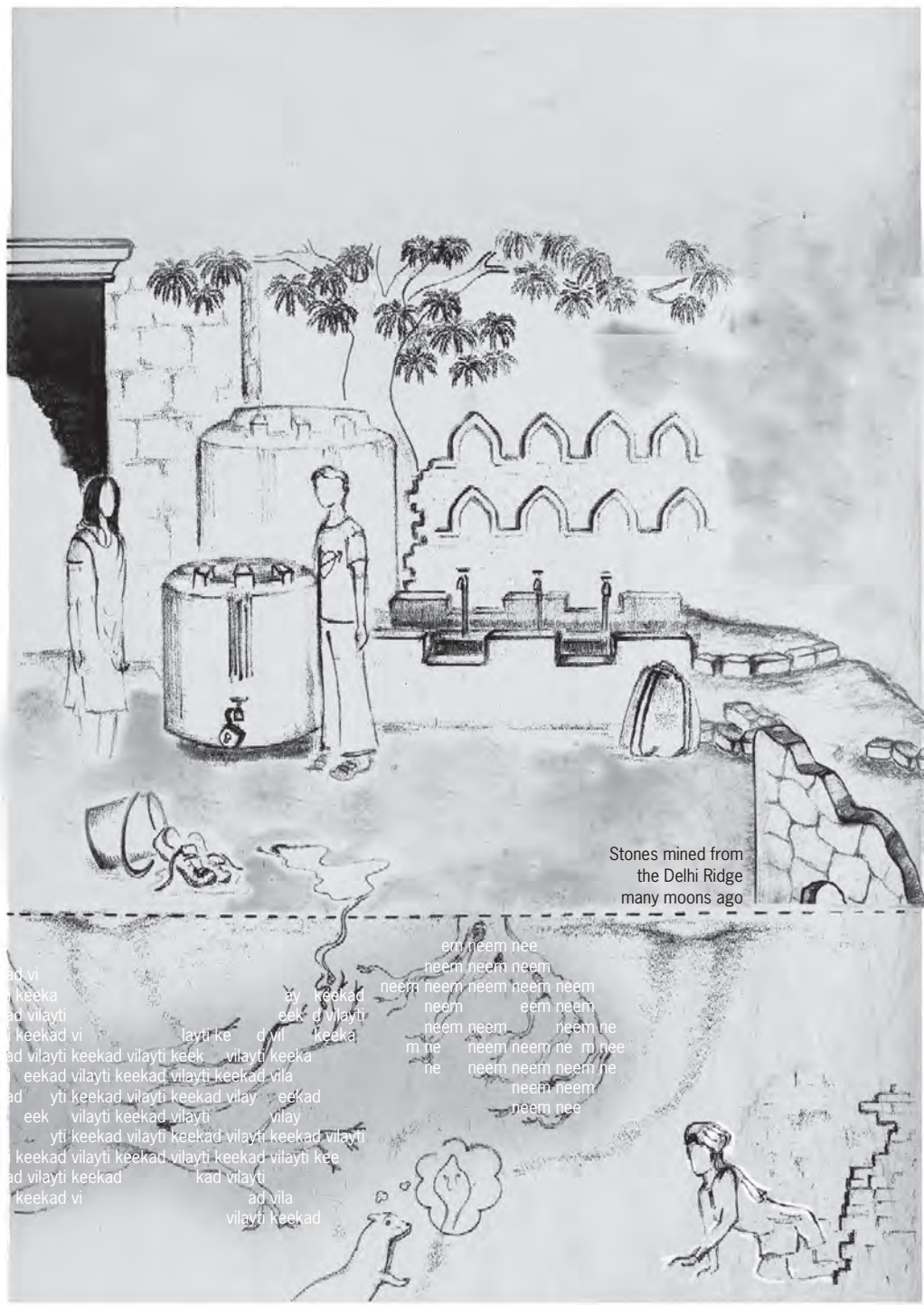
The resident: "It's always the poor who suffer; the rich don't have to bother about anything".

But there are perks to living in a centuries-old building. "There are staircases that go to the basement. Underground, there are passages to different monuments. You don't know where you may emerge. Maybe the Bhool Bhulaiya monument, where whole wedding processions have gotten lost. Or maybe the Red Fort in Delhi or the Taj Mahal in Agra".



The new *maulana* came to the area 17 years ago, when the water in a nearby pond was so clean that you could see clear through to the bottom. He fought a court case on behalf of the Waqf Board to keep control of the building, fighting off takeover attempts from the Archaeological Survey of India, the Delhi Development Authority and the Lieutenant Governor. "I have papers from the 1400s to prove that this place was a property of the Waqf. From the 1400s!"

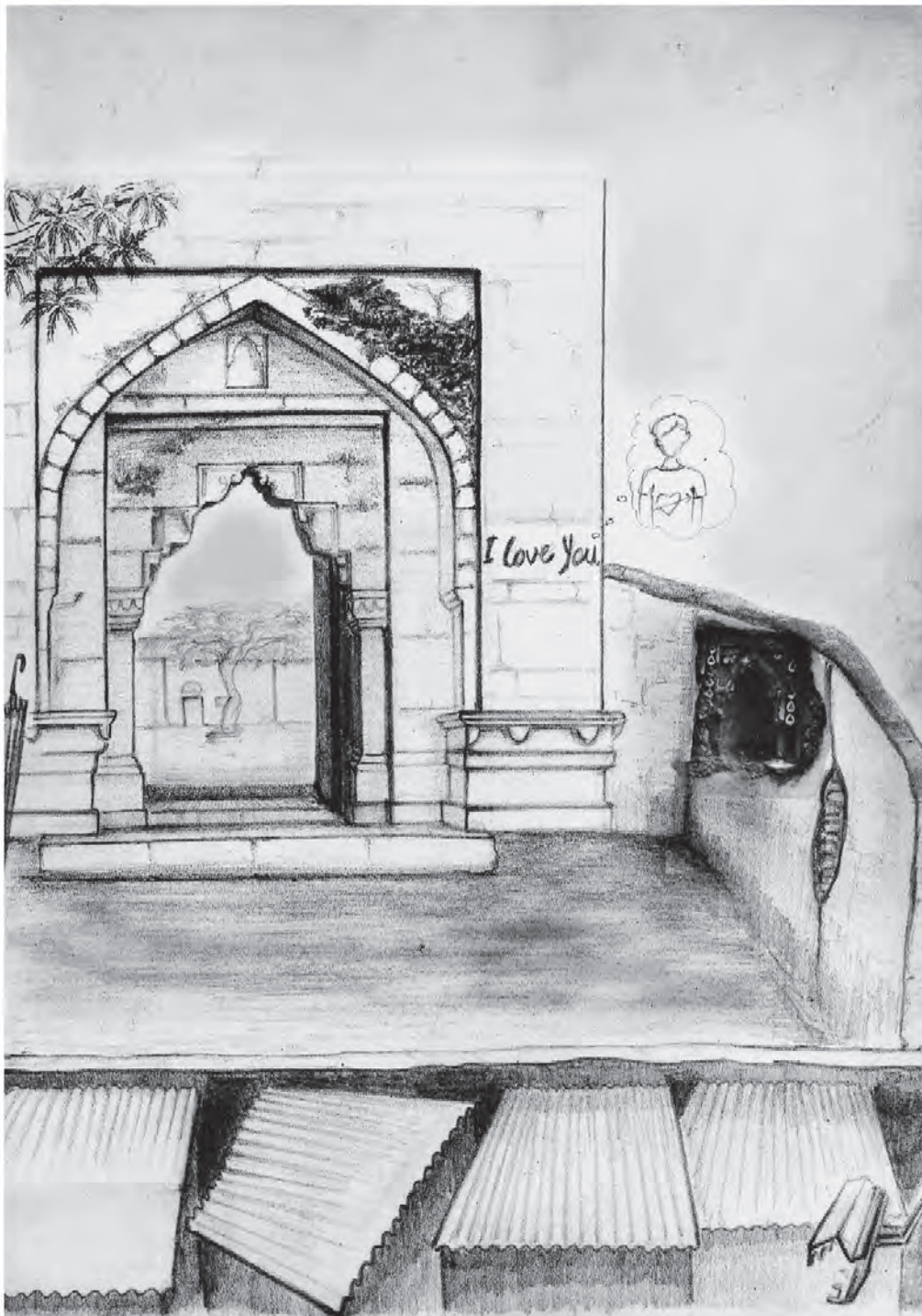
"Paisa phenko, tamasha dekho.
Rules are only for the poor, the rich can do as they please".



Stones mined from
the Delhi Ridge
many moons ago

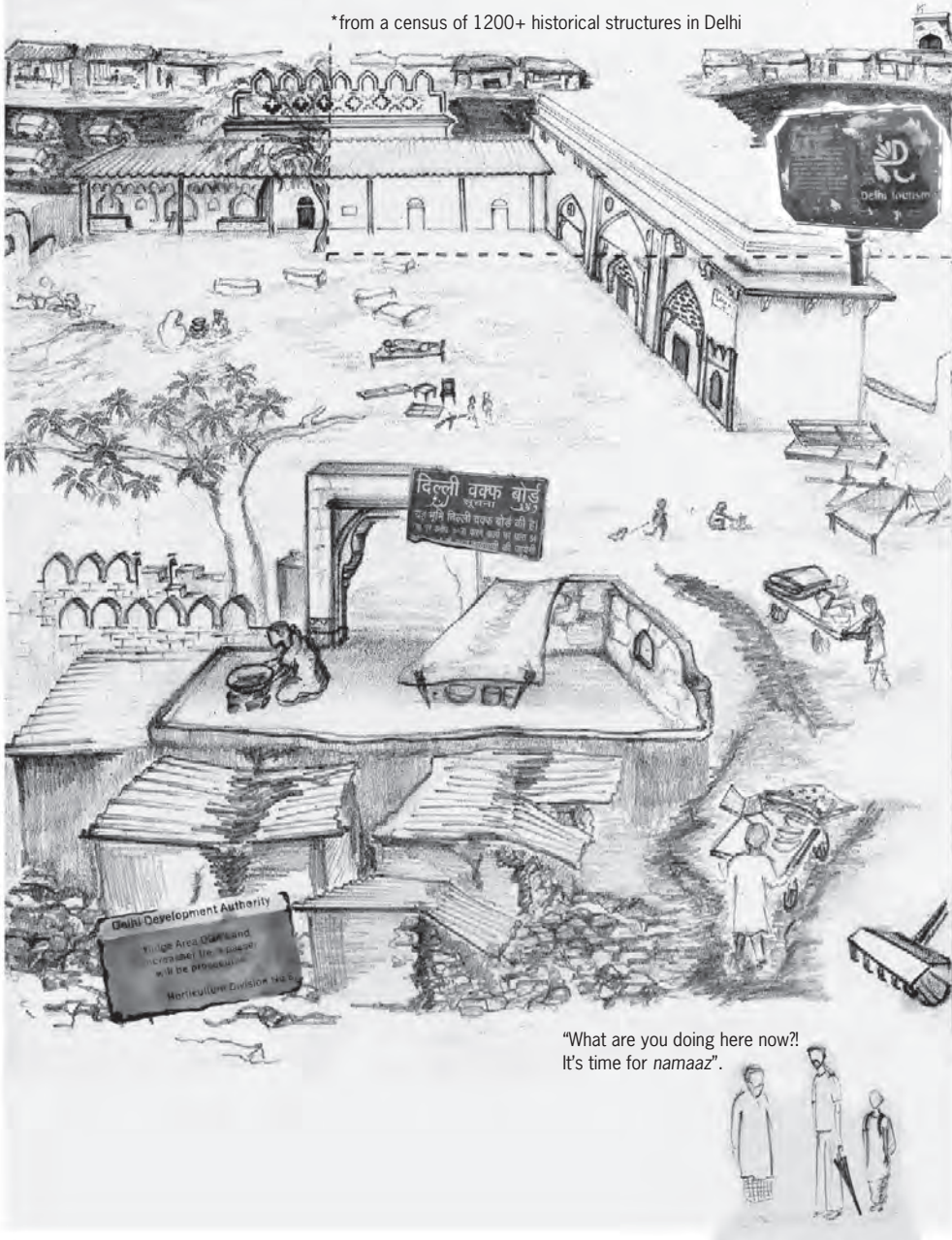
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No. F442. Status: Unprotected
State of Preservation: Serious Deterioration*

*from a census of 1200+ historical structures in Delhi



"What are you doing here now?
 It's time for namaaz".

THE CINEMA AS A CONCERT HALL

Alexis Bhagat + Lauren Rosati

Preface: Four Problems of Sound Art

The Formal Problem: 'Sound art' is fundamentally a non-essential and imprecise phrase. It describes any number of distinct practices that use sound as material and engage with various concerns such as acoustics, psychoacoustics, spacialisation, sculpture, language, poetry, narrative, communication, transmission. This lack of discernible essence and disparity of tradition *leads to*

The Institutional Problem: Because of this formal problem, it is difficult to provide institutional support for sound art. Partly as a consequence of the development of curricula and degree programmes in 'Music and Technology' and 'Sound Art' or 'Audio Art', great progress has been made in the past 10 to 15 years to address this problem. While institutions like Phonurgia Nova and free103point9 have pushed forward models for supporting new sound work, museums and art centres most often make forays into the intermedia of sound art through establishing a *concert series*. The simplicity of this solution acts like a kind of gravitational force, pulling sound artists to the safe surface of a table at the head of a room full of people where they plug in their laptops and perform, as in a pianist's recital, whether or not that mode makes sense for their work or their concerns. *This is related to*

The Technical Problem: Every work of sound art depends upon a *container*. This container could be a sculpture, a score, a computer, a recording medium or an arrangement of microphones and filters, to name just a few possibilities. Works also require a *platform*, such as an ensemble of machines and/or performers. With works that are directly acoustic – which either produce 'original sound' by striking or otherwise causing their container to resonate, or which work as an acoustic filter for the found sound of their site – the container *doubles* as platform. But most often, the platform is basically a playback set up – a 'PA', a mixer-amp-speaker assemblage – something that the artist can *plug into*. The *plugging* of that container into a platform is the *technical problem*.

Technical problems are easily solved. But when the Institutional Problem is added to the Technical Problem, they together *lead to*

The Situational Problem: *One concert after another*. Because institutions understand 'concerts' and because there is no standard acoustic platform for artists to 'plug into', sound artists are often required to travel to an art centre to set up a platform themselves and 'perform' their works so as to interpret and modulate the playback of their compositions, accounting for technical and acoustic variations in different sites. Artists who compose with recordings are forced to 'perform' because it is impossible for someone to just 'press play'.

And yet around the world there exists an entire network of standardised auditoriums with built-in, multi-channel sound. And they even serve popcorn. We propose the re-purposing of the cinema as a concert hall to address the *Situational Problem* of sound art. What follows is an examination of cinema history from an acoustic perspective, from its roots in the music hall to its prospects for the future.



Exterior, Koster & Bial's Concert Hall,
23rd Street near Sixth Avenue, 1892
MID-MANHATTAN LIBRARY PICTURE COLLECTION,
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



Interior, Koster & Bial's
Concert Hall
MID-MANHATTAN
LIBRARY PICTURE
COLLECTION,
NEW YORK PUBLIC
LIBRARY



Edison's Greatest Marvel –
The Vitascope, poster, ca. 1896
NEW YORK: METROPOLITAN
PRINT COMPANY,
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

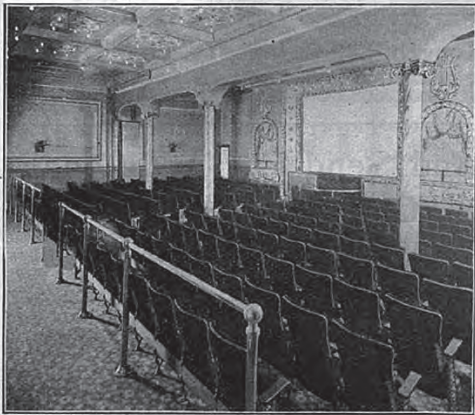


Koster & Bial's Music Hall,
West 34th, near Broadway,
poster, ca. 1896
CREATED AND COPYRIGHT 1896 BY
THE STROBRIDGE LITH. CO., CINCINNATI,
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Koster and Bial's Music Hall

Koster and Bial's Music Hall can be seen as a precursor to the modern movie theatre. John Koster and Adam Bial were German-American brewers who opened a concert hall and saloon at the corner of 23rd Street and Sixth Avenue in Manhattan in 1879, but their combination of booze and vaudeville was seen as too racy, so they were shut down by the city's 'vice squad' in 1892.

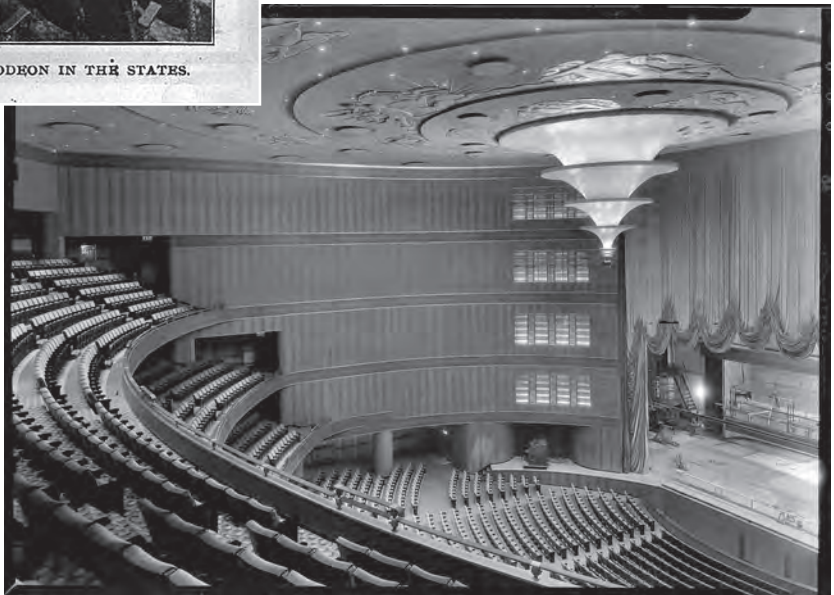
At the same time, the impresario Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera House on 34th Street and Sixth Avenue had completely failed. Looking to reinvigorate the business with new management, Hammerstein hired Koster and Bial. This became *Koster and Bial's Music Hall*, which opened two days after the opera house closed. In 1896, a screen was installed, and Koster and Bial's became the site of one of the first public exhibitions of a projected film, using Thomas Edison's Vitascope. (A plaque at the site, now occupied by Macy's department store, designates it as "the site of the first public projection of a moving picture"; however, the Lumière Brothers' screening of the Cinematographe at Le Salon Indien du Grand Café in Paris predates the Vitascope screening by several months.)



Interior of the first Nickelodeon theatre,
Pittsburgh, Pa., November 1907
PHOTO: MOVING PICTURE WORLD

INTERIOR OF FIRST NICKELODEON IN THE STATES.

The Roxy Theatre
on 49th Street, 1932
PHOTO: SAMUEL H. GOTTSCHO
GOTTSCHO-SCHLEISNER COLLECTION
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Nickelodeon to Roxy

The Nickelodeon developed soon after, in the early 20th century. This type of small neighbourhood movie theatre that played films for a nickel first opened in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1905. Nickelodeons would typically play short narrative films, films of vaudeville acts, stop-action sequences or sporting events. These theatres began to decline with the advent of the feature film, beginning with *Birth of a Nation* in 1915, and as cities grew and industry consolidation led to larger and more comfortable movie theatres.

Both Koster and Bial's theatre and the nickelodeon had central corridors with seats facing a frontal screen; they were, in other words, designed to maximise one's ability to see the film. As movies became more popular, movie palaces were built in the late teens and 20s, featuring elaborate modern design, luxurious interiors, giant screens and theatre boxes. By 1920, more than 20,000 movie palaces were operating in the US. Many major motion picture studios financed and built early movie palaces designed for orchestras to play music to accompany projected films, including the Roxy Theater in New York City. Built by Samuel Lionel 'Roxy' Rothafel at a cost of \$10 million, it was dubbed 'The Cathedral of the Motion Picture', given the 6,200-seat capacity it opened with in 1927.

Introducing the Soundtrack

In 1927, the sound film arrived with *The Jazz Singer*, the first commercially successful sound film or *talkie* (short for 'talking picture'). *The Jazz Singer* was not a true talkie, however, but was rather a hybrid of sound and silent, featuring long musical interludes with silent era intertitles that illustrated the dramatic dialogue. Musical numbers were performed by the singer Al Jolson. The first Indian talkie, *Alam Ara*, premiered in Bombay four years later. Silent films were still made well into the 1930s, but were eventually eclipsed by the sound film; the theatre transformed, as a result, from a place for **seeing** to a place for **experiencing** – from facing-forward to immersion.

When Walt Disney's *Fantasia* was still in development, Disney met with conductor Leopold Stokowski to discuss the film's classical music score. Stokowski suggested that Disney contact the engineers at Bell Labs, who were working on a multiple-microphone stereo recording technology. Intrigued by the technology, Disney thought it would be wonderful if, during the movie's "Flight of the Bumblebee" segment, the musical sound of the bumblebee could be heard flying all around the audience, not just in front of them.

After much research, *Fantasia* (released in 1940) became the very first film to incorporate surround sound. Yet the additional equipment necessary to reproduce Fantasound was too costly to roll out on a widespread basis, and only two Fantasound systems were sold, one to New York's Broadway Theater and one to the Carthay Circle Theater in Los Angeles. These installations cost \$85,000 each and included 54 speakers placed throughout the auditorium. Fantasound also required an audio engineer separate from the projectionist to literally 'play' the soundtrack at every screening. This scenario led Disney to produce two scaled-back road show versions of the Fantasound system with three channels and without surround sound, at a cost of \$45,000. Expensive and unwieldy, Fantasound was never used again but became significant for conveying the idea and setting the stage for specialisation and the future of stereo sound.

3-4-5

The 'true stereo' three channels of *Fantasia* were standardised in the 1950s as Fox CinemaScope, a synchronised multi-channel sound format which recorded sound onto strips of magnetic tape coating the film stock, using a technique innovated by Hazard Reeves of the Reeves Soundcraft Corporation. Since the strips of tape were printed onto the spaces around

the perforations, there were four available bands; thus quadraphonic sound – featuring Left, Right, Centre (Dialogue) and Effects – was born. Reeves later went on to develop the six-channel sound of the Cinerama format, but it was Quadraphonic that would be modified to become the newly adopted standard. Sound engineer John Mosely, who developed Quintaphonic sound, used a ‘matrix’ system to record four channels of sound on to only two magnetic tracks. Separating the Stereo into four channels (Left, Right, Left Surround, and Right Surround), Quintaphonic, or ‘Sound in the Round’, provided true surround sound. A distinct centre/front channel for dialogue was recorded on to one of the remaining magnetic strips.

By the 1970s, the four-channel magnetic sound system was mostly obsolete. In addition to installing additional speakers in theatres, Mosley and his team had to repair and align the basic magnetic playback equipment. Every theatre that wanted to play Quintaphonic sound had to be specially equipped to accommodate this new format. The Who’s *Tommy* (1975) was the first film to use Quintaphonic sound but was also the last, as it was unable to compete with the superior Dolby Stereo format which was developed at the same time. Recorded optically, Dolby Stereo was much less expensive than 35mm magnetic film and could be played in a variety of cinemas.

Quadraphonic sound remained an experimental musical format, and 5.1 would become the new cinema standard. The Centre channel for dialogue from behind the screen would forever distinguish cinematic from musical sound recordings.

Dolby Stereo, introduced in 1975, was a two-track optical recording that was matrix-split either into four channels of sound (Left, Centre, Right, Surround) or into a six-channel recording with five-channels of Quintaphonic and an additional ‘Low Frequency Effects’ subwoofer channel. *A Star is Born* (1976) was the first widely released movie to make use of this technology, but it was *Star Wars* (1977) that completely transformed the industry, making surround sound a necessity for every movie theatre interested in staying in business. With its swooping ‘special effects’, the success of *Star Wars* inspired theatre owners to upgrade their systems, and led other producers and studios to embrace the surround sound format. George Lucas and Lucasfilm Corporation tightly controlled the release of *Star Wars*, only allowing it to be presented in cinemas where the soundtrack played back correctly (to their ears). With huge demand for the sequel, *The Empire Strikes Back*, Lucasfilm developed THX (based on the title of Lucas’ 1971 debut, *THX 1138*), a certification program that approved the acoustics and playback system of cinemas.

The dominance of Dolby over competing audio formats and certification programs like THX led to a standardisation of the audio-visual experience in theatres around the world. It also inadvertently contributed to the rise of ‘art house’ cinema, which played works in mono or two-track stereo on legacy or non-standardised equipment, and was separate from the system of industrial film distribution.

The Cinema as an Opera Hall

As Michel Chion, the world’s foremost critic of film sound, has written of this standardised landscape:

But a sort of general poetic fog, a background noise, still envelops the films of the 1930s and ‘40s, while the sound of the ‘70s and ‘80s, because of technical evolution, becomes increasingly analytic. Each element is separate from the others, and the silence between sounds can become more palpable... Today we are in the age when Dolby is discovering the beauty of silence around sounds, particularly around voices. Think of Kurosawa’s *Dreams*, Kieslowski’s *Double vie de Veronique* or Lynch’s *Wild at Heart* and *Lost Highway*. Because of very loud and

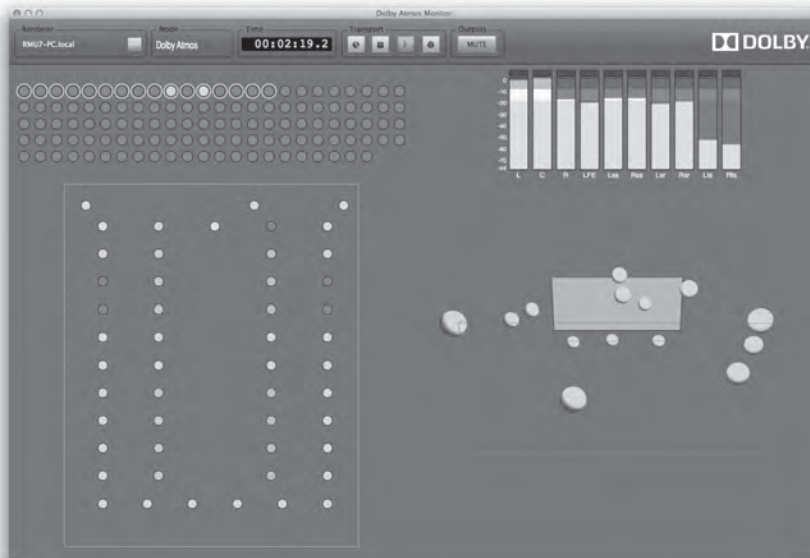
rhythmic passages of rock music, one forgets that the latter two films have many sequences in which auditory emptiness envelops confidences, and scenes where dialogue is slow and sparse.

Michel Chion, *The Voice of Cinema*¹

Contemporary cinema's capacity for high-volume is inseparable from its capacity for quiet, for silence. Lynch's *Wild at Heart* is exemplary here, from the deafening electric guitars in the opening scene to the silence of jail, to the larger-than-life vocals of Sailor's performance of Elvis Presley's *Love Me Tender* during the closing credits. While most Hollywood and Bollywood directors have ignored the capacity for silence and have instead utilised Dolby sound for ever louder explosions and musical numbers, an unlikely group has charted a future course for the cinema as a concert hall. Since 2006, the New York's Metropolitan Opera has transmitted live via satellite to cinemas around the world. As Peter Gelb of the Metropolitan Opera explained:

The prototype for these relays came from pop music. A marketer at Sony reminded me how David Bowie launched his album *Reality* in 2003. He played a concert for 450 people at the Riverside Studios in London, which went out to 88 cinemas in 26 countries. I thought, why not apply the model to opera?²

The Met Opera: Live in HD broadcasts illustrate the numerous gates and back-doors that digital cinema – which decouples picture and sound from the physical medium of the film – has punched into the walls of proprietary cinema technology in recent years. Previous to the cross-over to digital cinema, a project like *The Met Opera: Live in HD* would have been impossible to present in a Dolby-equipped theatre and on an ongoing basis. Cinemas were not constructed to receive transmissions, and Dolby sound processors were connected directly to film projectors and decoded only the optical soundtrack running on the



Dolby Atmos Plug-in Monitor
User Interface
COURTESY: DOLBY

film. David Bowie's unique 2003 concert was made possible through a dedicated collaboration between Columbia Records and DTS, the manufacturer of a competing multi-channel audio format to Dolby, which decodes digital sound independent of the film projector. In the digital cinema age, transmission via the Internet or live satellite broadcast has replaced shipments of film-reels. With the Met's efforts, the future of the cinema as a concert hall seems a little more secure.

Nevertheless, live-broadcast only exists as an option for the most popular of art forms. Thankfully, the digital cinema era offers unprecedented possibilities for composers of multi-channel music, audio art and installations to – at last! – simply ‘press play’.

After Pax Dolby: Postscript on the Future

On 4 June 2012, the lights dimmed at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles for the premiere of the animated film *Brave* by Pixar Studios. The occasion also marked the premiere of a third, ‘atmospheric’ dimension of immersive sound. Sound designer Erik Aadahl described this sound system, the Dolby Atmos, just before the premiere:

I've been thinking about this format and designing material to play in this format and realizing... that [it] is like an instrument now.³

The “object-based sound mixing” of Dolby Atmos is one of two leading formats – the other being Isoono's wave-field synthesis – that are bringing new dimensions to cinema sound.⁴ In a few years, a multi-sensory cinematic experience (hearing and seeing, as well as smelling and touching) may be *de rigueur*, and we may look back on 5.1 surround sound as quaint. But until then, the opportunities of this period of Pax Dolby, with its uniform standards and simple access, should not be ignored. It won't last forever. ■

Notes

- 1 Michel Chion. **The Voice of Cinema** (Columbia University Press, 1999 New York), p. 168.
- 2 Peter Conrad. “Opera from New York in your hometown? Easy. Just go to the pictures”. In **The Observer**, 21 April 2007. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2007/apr/22/classicalmusicandopera.features1> (last accessed 11 March 2013).
- 3 Kristopher Tapley. “Tech Support: Dolby Atmos ready for its close-up with the premiere of Pixar's 'Brave'”. In **HitFix**. Available at: <http://www.hitfix.com/in-contention/tech-support-dolby-atmos-ready-for-its-close-up-with-the-premiere-of-pixars-brave> (last accessed 12 March 2013).
- 4 David Hancock. “Cinema sound becomes a competitive environment again”. In **Screen Digest**. Available at: http://www.screendigest.com/news/2012_05_cinema_sound_becomes_a_competitive_environment_again/view.html (last accessed 12 March 2013).



CURATORIAL GOVERNMENTALITY

AIR DESIGN AND THE ATMOSPHERES OF COMMUNITY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Anirban Gupta-Nigam

On 27 December 1919, shortly before he boarded the SS *Touraine* to travel from Le Havre to New York, Marcel Duchamp went to a pharmacy, purchased a medium-sized vial and asked the shopkeeper to empty its contents and re-seal it. He gave the vial to his friends in New York – Walter and Louise Arensberg – as a gift, because they already had everything else. Duchamp called it *Air de Paris*. In spite of the inaccurate naming (since the vial was not Parisian nor was the air) Duchamp was clearly mindful of the ‘original’ because when, in 1949,

the vial broke, he asked a friend in Le Havre to replace it. In 1959, during an interview with Calvin Tomkins in New York, Duchamp said: “Art was a dream that became unnecessary... I spend my time very easily, but I wouldn’t know how to tell you what I do... I’m a *respirateur* – a breather”.¹

In modernist art practice, by the second decade of the 20th century, we find several instances of a consciousness of air, something the world at large took for granted prior to 1915, the year that saw the first instance of gas warfare when, as the brilliant German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk demonstrates, the deprivation of oxygen suddenly made us aware of our existence in atmosphere. From the explorations of Marcel Duchamp and Yves Klein down to Olaf Eliasson’s magnificent *Weather Project* at the Tate Modern, the environment has become explicated in increasing detail. And as the modernist project has given way to different modes of engaging with culture, design has taken on the challenge of remaking our world in times of great ecological crises and impending catastrophe.

In this essay, I argue three interrelated things: first, to the extent that we exist *in* air, *air is community*; second, design is almost an ‘organising principle’ of contemporary life, penetrating all aspects of the everyday; third, we might think of such design-oriented cosmopolitics² in conjunction with what I am calling “curatorial governmentality”.

Central to all these suggestions (which I will flesh out in the following pages) is the contention that air is community; and, unsurprisingly, Marcel Duchamp got here a few decades prior to the rest of us. *Air de Paris*, seen in this scheme, is not simply an illustration of the eccentric genius of a great master of 20th century art. Rather, it is an acknowledgement – tacit perhaps – of our existence *in* the atmosphere, of our ability to capture, shape and design the world around us. The distinction between an artist and a *respirateur* can blur easily in such a reading. That breathing/respiration concerned Duchamp greatly is further illustrated by a cryptic note he once wrote: “Establish a society in which the individual has to pay for the air he breathes (air meters; imprisonment and rarefied air); in case of non-payment simple asphyxiation, if necessary (cut off the air)”. The act of sharing air in one case and the dystopic fantasy of cutting its supply off in the other are both stark visions of communities that exist *in* air; where respiration *is* art, and where the atmosphere is not a ‘natural’ entity which hangs in the air (as it were) eternally. In his work, Peter Sloterdijk argues that human environments have always been “air conditioned”. The great folly of humanism was its confidence that human beings were liberated, rational beings who could rule over nature. Humanists never realised that people are naked, constantly on life supports, propped by the envelopes that surround them. Modernists assumed nature – the atmosphere – would always be there.³ It is only with gas war – and then the Holocaust – that the atmosphere was *explicitated*: the fragility of human life was exposed once and for all. We have always been, Sloterdijk argues citing Herder, “students of the air”;⁴ and “ventilation is the most profound secret of existence”.⁵ He begins with Heidegger but rather than ask ‘what is Being’, Sloterdijk asks, ‘What is Being *in*’ – and he answers that there is no outside anymore. We are always *in*. Air is now the fundamental condition of our existence, even more than the earth itself.⁶ Although Sloterdijk discusses an episode around Salvador Dali in great detail and merely mentions Duchamp in passing, there is ample reason to think that Duchamp’s work and comments on air can be taken as an exemplary avant-gardist attempt to grapple with atmosphere post-explicitation.

The great avant-garde dream, as many common narratives have it, was to bridge the distance between art and life. Undoubtedly these attempts failed. At another level, however, the modernist dream survived. Indeed, as a popular advertisement by Chivas Studio demonstrates, not only did it survive, in later years a clear circularity was established between the two domains that the avant-gardes had wanted to bridge: *art is life is art*, goes the Chivas Studio campaign slogan.

Rather than being a retreat from politics – as some would have it – design can in fact be formulated as the basis for a new politics – and this is the implication that Bruno Latour draws from Sloterdijk's work. Design, he argues, is free of the arrogant connotation of terms like 'creation' and 'construction'. It makes a double movement: on the one hand, it calls for detail, skill, care and minute inspection of the problems at hand; on the other, its scope moves beyond the simple designing of products (which isn't as simple as it might seem) to the designing and redesigning of larger spaces – homes, cities, environments and nature itself.⁷ For Latour, design is an antidote to aggressive modernisation and revolutionisation which sought always to establish a radical break with the past. Design never begins anew, it is always a process of *redesigning*; and it contains an ethical element – there can be good and bad design, possibilities which never existed when modernism reigned supreme because in modernism 'matters of fact' cannot be good or bad, they are just that: matters of fact.⁸

In "A Foreword to the Theory of Spheres", Sloterdijk suggests the modern world is a precarious work of art, and taking this suggestion seriously lies at the heart of my endeavour:

Modern man is a sort of 'curator' – the term doesn't really exist in French – which is to say, an exhibition planner of the space that he himself inhabits. Every man has become a museum curator. We could say that installation art is the common meta-profession that everyone is obliged to practice. The innocence of the traditional habitat is lost for good. After the actual destruction of so many things and the proof of the destructibility of everything, each inhabitant, in no matter which apartment, city, or country, has become or been forced to become a sort of planner of his own space.⁹

Henk Oosterling playfully interprets the Sloterdijkian formula as "*Dasein ist design*".¹⁰ I want to suggest in the remaining part of this paper that if the world is an installation or a museum space, as Sloterdijk suggests, and if we are all, in such a framework, planners of space, then we might revisit governmentality through this aesthetic postulate and view the act of curating space, of arranging objects in relation to human beings, of planning highways and airports, as part of a series of aesthetic-design choices made in the realm of what is usually called 'the political'.

Looking back at the recent past of Delhi, one might argue that history can be rewritten to speak of a consciousness of air as community, dating from at least the 1996 Supreme Court judgement on polluting industries that led to a large-scale relocation of industries and people to the peripheries of the city. Glancing through the literature produced by civil and workers' rights groups at the time, two things become abundantly clear: one, if life shotthrough with design is akin to a super-installation, then the Master Plan is the exhibition catalogue; and two, in spite of the frequent use of the word 'pollution', it appears retrospectively that our existence in air was not quite grasped at the time when these turbulent transformations were occurring. To elaborate on both these observations: reports and commentaries from the mid-1990s to at least the early 2000s speak of the changes occurring in the urban landscape with minute attention to the Master Plan of the city – pointing out, rightly no doubt, the various errors in the state's posture vis-à-vis the working classes of the city. The Master Plan emerges in these discussions as a document open to different interpretations, facilitating different curators to envision different cities. In other words, through all the citation of specific facts and figures, regulations and violations, what emerges is a 'political aesthetic' of the city: how will it be organised, who will be allowed to inhabit it, which structures should stand, what kind of communities constitute a city, and how do people and architectural units in a city relate to each other.¹¹ Here is one example:

Those who hold this exploited toiling class of people responsible for making Delhi dirty should bear in mind that it is these same workers whose hands have built the sprawling mansions, country clubs, upmarket restaurants and shopping arcades that 'beautify' Delhi. These workers have also built the long stretches of smooth road on which their shining cars glide.¹²

This quotation is embedded in the political aesthetic I referred to above. Clear connections are drawn between hard, manual labour and the beautification of cities. Mansions, clubs, arcades, shining cars which glide on long stretches of smooth road – an indictment of this kind of the happenings in the city at the time cannot be seen as simply a 'political' battle being waged against globalisation. It was a different aesthetic that was being summoned up in statements such as this.

Even though pollution is mentioned frequently¹³ and "bourgeois environmentalism"¹⁴ is recognised as propelling the developments Delhi witnessed at the time, the atmospheric nature of the crisis seems always to be deflected into territorial issues of development, planning and manufacturing. In retrospect one wonders whether an accurate charge levelled against the court's order – that it made pollution an excuse to reorganise the city – did not also overlook the most obvious aspect of the judgement. Protestors constantly deflected the question of air (space) to land (territory), thus failing in some respects to recognise that the judgement didn't simply use a human-interest issue (health) to push a political agenda (displacement), but in fact established the impossibility of what Sloterdijk calls "atmospheric communism".¹⁵ In those days, when the city was being restructured and reorganised – redesigned, of course! – a parallel process was set into motion: the privatisation of air, a fact that seems to have escaped most of the commentators at the time, for whom pollution did not concern space but *land*. While dissenting opinions formulated critiques in the language of 'right to the city' and 'citizenship', they overlooked the fact that what was occurring was not simply the territorial redesigning of city spaces, but also an atmospheric partitioning of the air different communities would breathe: the working class would breathe the air it produced, quite literally. To this extent, producing data to demonstrate vehicles pollute as much as, if not more than, factories scarcely made a difference because the two objects – cars and industries – were inserted into different atmospheric communities. We might ask, then, whether the question was *clean air* or *our air*.

Since 1996, things have gotten clearer. In 2010, on the eve of the Commonwealth Games, a more intense vision of air as community became apparent, and design began to take over more clearly. In the first half of 2010, those of us who still travelled to Connaught Place as it was being reduced to rubble in order to be rebuilt for the Games saw outside Palika Bazaar a large, green, box-like structure placed next to the entrance of the Metro station. On closer inspection, one discovered the structure was an air purifier installed by an Italian company called Systemlife. According to the company's website, its mission is "to improve the quality of the air," since the quality of life depends on it".

According to a *Wall Street Journal* report, after operationalising the purifier in Connaught Place, company officials were shocked to find uranium in the city's air – something they said should only be found around "nuclear reactors, not in a place like Central Delhi".¹⁶

In the run-up to and during the Games, however, we were witness to a great deal of weather talk. The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) runs a 'Right to Clear Air Campaign', and in the days leading up to the opening ceremony, their website put out a story with a detailed plan for how to effectively control pollution through simple urban design measures: congestion charges on cars, better public transport, lowering emissions from thermal and power industries (with a specific, laudatory reference to the industrial relocations

of the 1990s).¹⁷ A report in the CSE publication *Down to Earth* a month later continued the campaign and demonstrated great knowledge of the atmospheric envelopes in which we are embedded. “Cleaning the air is crucial”, the report stated, “because the city’s pollution levels could hit the athletes in particular. *Their breathing pattern is different*, said Sunita Godara, Asian Marathon Champion. *They usually breathe vigorously through their mouth while exercising and playing. Pollutants are carried deep into the lungs*” [emphasis added].¹⁸

Real-time weather monitoring, air purification and concentration of campaigns around major national events all go a long way in explicitly locating urban communities in a context where air has been finally and irreversibly explicitated. With global warming and the threat of ecological crisis looming large, the perpetual air-conditioning in which we live is now more apparent than ever before. Alongside these large scale efforts to control, modify and quantify climate, a parallel development has been the emergence of what we might term ‘atmospheric enclaves’, which are literally air-conditioned spaces that seek to reproduce the social life of cities within closed doors. Malls are becoming ecosystems, with fake palm trees, benches, sometimes street signs built into their design. Charles Correa once famously said, “Form follows climate”. Although Correa was referring most likely to the need for cultural specificity in architecture, this statement takes on new meaning in our time. It seems to presuppose climate as an untouched, pure element which can be weaved into a continuum with humans through the intervention of architects and designers. But in a situation where climate is thoroughly designed and modified, such a dictum seems to simply reach back for an atmospheric communism that no longer exists. A perfect example of this fantasy is Correa’s – quite wonderful – design for the City Centre in Kolkata. On its website, City Centre conveys Correa’s intentions, and while reading through this marvellous concept, we cannot help but be struck by the utopia it lunges back for: a time when atmosphere was *shared by all*:

There are several aspects to City Centre. Its inclusiveness for one. With no boundaries to separate it from the street, it is open to everyone of all income and age groups... City Centre tries to cater to every segment of society. Branded stores rub shoulders with their unbranded cousins, the ubiquitous muri-wala and chayer dokan (Tea Junction) reach out to visitors along with Café Coffee Day, Pizza Hut and their ilk. Heritage, culture and indomitable Kolkata spirit are not trampled over by rampant commercialism as a vintage tram, an instant art wall and an NGO pavilion stake their claim with gentle persuasiveness.¹⁹

All malls operate on this paradoxical fantasy of an atmospheric community (communism) in a designed, privatised space. While in places like Mumbai, malls attempt to open themselves out to morning walkers,²⁰ in Delhi, they lunge for different forms of community through, among other things, art – art on air pollution, sometimes, too! The most grotesque parody of our increasing obsession with atmospheric communism, at a time when we redesign the communal as private, was probably the theatrics around the gigantic aerostat acquired for the Commonwealth Games by Suresh Kalmadi and company. The aerostat, Kalmadi said – and we ought to pay attention to these words – “is no ordinary balloon *but a piece of technology and art*”.²¹ The news report where this quote appears goes on: “The unveiling took place amid heavy downpours but after the ceremony Kalmadi said that the aerostat would stand still ‘even during rains and it stands tall without any problem at all’”.²² The aerostat – the word literally meaning ‘to stand on air’ – seems to be a perfect metaphor for our times, times when we who are so thoroughly enmeshed and entangled in the atmosphere still continue to think we are in fact standing *on air*. ■

Notes

- 1 Quoted in Peter Sloterdijk, **Terror from the Air** (Semiotext(e), 2009, Paris), p. 106.
- 2 Bruno Latour. "Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics? Comments on the Peace Terms of Ulrich Beck". In **Common Knowledge** 10(3), Duke University Press (2004).
- 3 Bruno Latour. "A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps Toward a Philosophy of Design (with Special Attention to Peter Sloterdijk)". 'Networks of Design' Keynote Lecture, September 2008. Available at: www.bruno-latour.fr/articles/article/112-DESIGN-CORNWALL.pdf (last accessed 12 December 2012).
- 4 Peter Sloterdijk. "Foreword to the Theory of Spheres". In (eds.) Melik Ohanian and Jean-Christophe Royoux, **Cosmograms** (Lucas & Sternberg, 2005, New York), p. 225.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Bruno Latour. "'Air Condition': Our New Political Fate". Available at: http://www.bruno-latour.fr/presse/presse_art/GB-03%20DOMUS%2003-04.html (last accessed 12 December 2012).
- 7 Latour, **Cautious Prometheus**, op. cit., p. 2.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 2-5.
- 9 Sloterdijk, "Foreword to the Theory of Spheres" op. cit., p. 230.
- 10 Henk Oosterling. "Dasein as Design, or Must Design Save the World?". **Premsele Lecture 2009** (Premsele, 2009, Amsterdam), p. 3.
- 11 Delhi Janwadi Adhikar Manch. "How Many Errors does Time have Patience for? Industrial Closures and Slum Demolitions in Delhi" (April 2001).
- 12 Ibid., p. 17.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Amita Baviskar. "Politics of the City". In **Seminar** (August 2002).
- 15 Peter Sloterdijk. "Spheres of Action: Art and Politics". Lecture at Tate Modern (December 2005). Available at: <http://channel.tate.org.uk/media/38501509001/26833497001> (last accessed 12 December 2012).
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- 17 Centre for Science and Environment. "Delhi Agrees to Use Commonwealth Games as an Opportunity to Address Air Quality Concerns" (15 May 2010). Available at: <http://www.cseindia.org/content/press-release-delhi-agrees-use-commonwealth-games-opportunity-address-air-quality-concerns> (last accessed 12 December 2012).
- 18 Priyanka Chandola. "Delhi's Wake Up Call". In **Down to Earth** (15 June 2010). Available at: <http://www.downtoearth.org.in/node/669> (last accessed 12 December 2012).
- 19 <http://www.citycentrekolkata.com/themall.asp> (last accessed 12 December 2012).
- 20 Sharvari Patwa. "Morning Walk at Malad Mall". In **The Indian Express** (25 May 2010). Available at: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/morning-walk-at-malad-mall/623089/> (last accessed 12 December 2012).
- 21 Press Trust of India. "CWG Aerostat Unveiled at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium" (8 September 2010). Available at: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/sports/news/CWG-Aerostat-unveiled-at-Jawaharlal-Nehru-Stadium/articleshow/6521196.cms> (last accessed 12 December 2012).
- 22 Ibid.

WALKING A FURLONG*

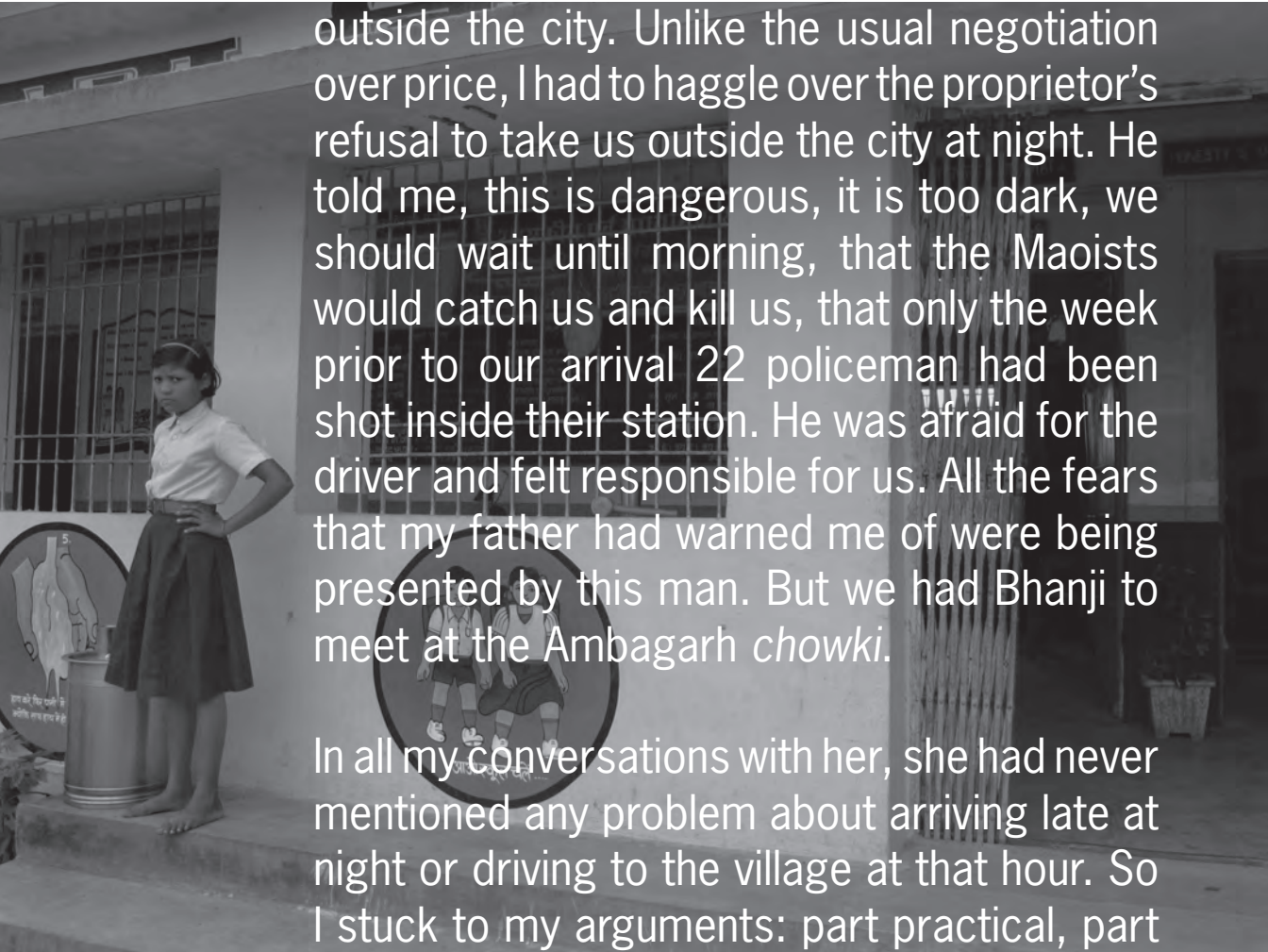
Kiran Chandra + Douglas Murray



* "And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral drest in his shroud..."
– Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself", **Leaves of Grass**, 1855.

I: Shortly after disembarking from the plane at the Raipur airport, I began a long negotiation to get a car and driver to take us to a village outside the city. Unlike the usual negotiation over price, I had to haggle over the proprietor's refusal to take us outside the city at night. He told me, this is dangerous, it is too dark, we should wait until morning, that the Maoists would catch us and kill us, that only the week prior to our arrival 22 policeman had been shot inside their station. He was afraid for the driver and felt responsible for us. All the fears that my father had warned me of were being presented by this man. But we had Bhanji to meet at the Ambagarh *chowki*.

In all my conversations with her, she had never mentioned any problem about arriving late at night or driving to the village at that hour. So I stuck to my arguments: part practical, part philosophical, until a driver stepped forward and offered to be the one to take us.



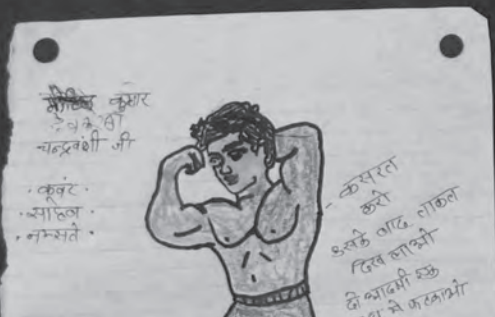
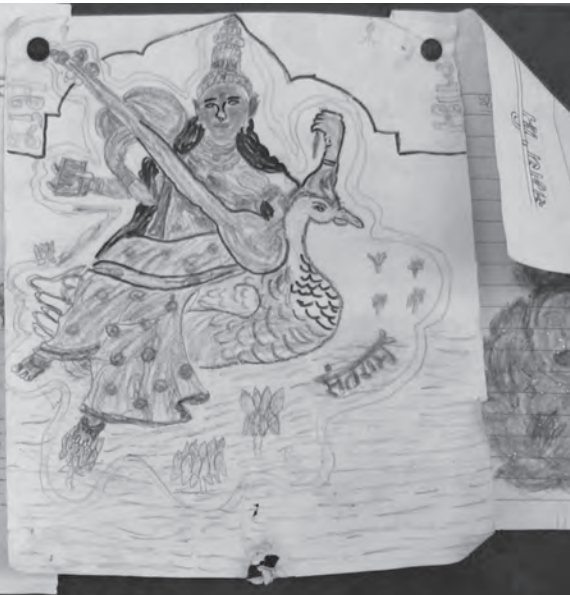
II: Hardip Singh was a ticket collector on a bus when the bus crashed, and his leg was permanently injured. That moment made him begin to question what he was doing with his life. He realised that if life were so tenuous, he needed to be sure that his work life had meaning. He started a newspaper broadside called *Vananchal*.

Being the sole employee of *Vananchal* meant that he created the broadside from start to finish. His reporting has endangered him more than it has endeared him to local politicians. He has been detained numerous times by the police for his interviews with local Naxal leaders. The logic being that only a Naxalite would have safe pass into Naxal-held jungle areas.

Perhaps, though, the police interest stems from Hardip exposing corruption around food rations. He wrote an exposé detailing a ceremony that the state government held for the press from the city. Sacks of *daal* and *chaaval* were distributed, and ration books were stamped in front of the assembled press. After the press corps packed up and left on their bus, Hardip hid in a bush. He used a battered old digital camera to document cronies of the politicians gathering up the rations from the villagers and then loading the sacks back on the truck. These photos documented something that the villagers had been complaining about for some time – that they were not receiving rations and had to buy them on the black market instead.

So while in his role as publisher, reporter, editor and distributor, Hardip was able to get a major scoop on local ration corruption, no one outside of a handful of villages was able to read the story. But along with getting the attention of his village readership, he garnered the attention of local politicians, Naxals and the police. While there is a danger beyond just harassment with this attention, he is holding true to the decision he made following his bus accident. Hardip is working with a purpose.

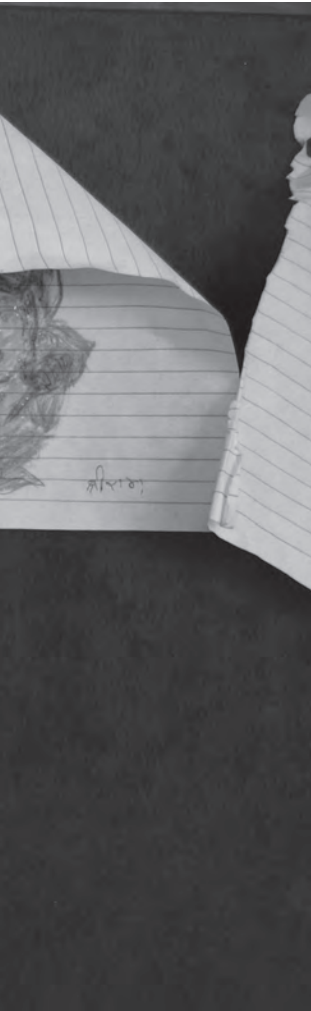




सिंदूर
देवकी
चंद्रवशी जी

कुर
साहित्य
नमस्ते

कुर
कुर
देवकी वाद लाल
दिव लाभी
देवकी स्त्री
या से कलकामा



III: Through a series of introductions via journalist friends, I am put in touch with Bhan Sahu, who goes by the name Bhanji in Rajnandangaon, where she has been actively interviewing residents, farmers, community members and even school children. The recordings from her and others' cell phones are streamed on cgnetswara.org, a virtual soapbox for the tribals of the state of Chhattisgarh. Here they speak their stories in their own voices.

A single mother, Bhan has been accused of being a Maoist sympathiser and a woman who does not keep to her place in the community. She was made to choose between her roles of activist and homemaker by her in-laws after the death of her husband. Her children who live with their grandparents are proud of their mother's commitment. As disruptive as this has been to her family life, Bhan carries with her an incredible inner belief and a sense of humour about her challenges. It was Bhan who welcomed us into her home, took us from village home to village home, cooked us the most delicious meals and enfolded us into her days.

IV: Midway through the day I began questioning what it was we were trying to find on this trip. In the conversations so far, the people we had spoken to had projected a sense of positivity and moving forward, despite deeper issues in the margins of the conversations. At least that is what I had been told by Kiran and Bhanji. I didn't speak either Hindi or Chhattisgarhi, and relied on their translation and interpretation of the interviews.

As we travelled to a village further away from the immediate area of the dam, it was clear that here there was less explicit governmental development. We, or rather Kiran and Bhanji, began talking to a few men outside of a grain-weighing stand. Quickly other men came over and began responding to the queries with a guarded interest. Soon we were invited to sit down, and a tense quiet came over the assembled men. We were told that the village headman was coming to talk with us, and that we should wait to talk until he arrived.

Upon the headman's arrival, I noticed a stiffening of postures and a change of countenance among the men. I also observed several women and children gathering outside of the circle. Within moments of the headman speaking to Bhanji, his voice rose to an agitated pitch, and the atmosphere within the circle darkened. I whispered to Kiran, trying to understand why this interaction was making a tense turn, but she waved me off to join the conversation.

Although I could only make out a word here and there, I could tell that what was up for debate was much larger than simply our presence and our questions. Soon the conversation spilled outside of just the headman and Bhanji, with various men debating and adding points. Bhan, for her part, seemed to come alive with the intensity of the debate, forcefully making points. Through reading physical gestures, emotional tones and a word or two, I was able to figure out that the debate in this village wasn't about simply improving a school or a road, but was about the place that these people had in society.

After an intense half hour, we stepped out. Standing on the edge was a woman who tugged on Bhanji. She wanted us to know that across the village was a medical office that was supposed to be staffed by nurses and a doctor. This woman told us that her son had been bitten by a scorpion, and they had brought him down to the clinic. No one was there. In the time it had taken to travel to the nearest functioning clinic, her son had died. We walked over to the clinic and, despite the posted hours, it was closed.

V: Our morning train from Raipur to Howrah had been delayed indefinitely. There was nobody at the station who was clear as to how long the delay was. The whispered rumours at the station were that the train would come later that night, as it did not want to be passing through Naxal territory in the wee hours of the morning. Doug and I were not too sure of where this Naxal territory began or ended, this dangerous space. It seemed the gaps between towns and cities were marked as vulnerable areas. The train was “regularly late”, we were told. This, it then dawned on us, was the new timing of the train, but it was not announced as such for fear of those faceless Naxals who were waiting in the hinterlands between town and town, city and city.

Having time on our hands, we decided to explore the city of Raipur and asked at the station master’s office what they would recommend we do. The malls were the unanimous suggestion; Raipur boasted seven malls and rising, and it would be our loss if we didn’t go shopping. A temple was also mentioned, but the mall had everyone’s eyes light up. I was reminded of a quote that it took a traveller to discover places of which locals may be unaware. But I chose to be a tourist instead that day. We hopped into a cycle rickshaw and asked for the closest mall, which turned out to be a massive edifice of stone and glass: CityMall. No laggard to the rest of booming India – bright and swanky and shiny, CityMall could have been plopped anywhere between Bangalore and Gurgaon. As we stepped into its shiny portals, my camera became an issue: strictly no photography allowed inside the mall. The déjà vu of bustling Big Bazaars, Moti-Mahals and Levi’s made me seek out an anomaly to this pattern, a local handicrafts store maybe? A restaurant which served Chhattisgarhi food? We could have gone for some of that *kareel* which Bhan had made for us the previous night.



In the ladies' room were a group of young women chatting and laughing and changing out of pant-and-shirt uniforms into *salwar kameezes*.



I asked them if they knew of any local crafts markets or fabric stores I could check out. One of them seemed to recall there being a handicrafts market in the area somewhere; another remembered going there once. Taking that as a good sign, we left the chilly Mall in search of the crafts market, which it turned out was around the corner, literally in the shadow of CityMall. Strewn in flowering kadamba trees, we walked among its shuttered stores – the only customers there. We entered a store selling *bastar*, *dokra* and bell-metal crafts. We struck up a conversation with a young man who, it turned out, was originally from Calcutta, my hometown, and he called it Calcutta as I do. We bought some small gifts, shared some tea with him and his colleague, talked about Christmas in Calcutta.

We headed for the station as it got dark, weaving our way in and out of the traffic jam of cars and rickshaws that were trying to enter the Mall.

THEORISING ART INTERVENTIONS: MANIFESTA 6 AND OCCUPY 38

Andrea Liu

The attack must be unexpected, frontal, and must come with the night when the building, undisturbed by its daily functions, is asleep and when its body dreams of itself, when the architecture has its nightmares. This will be a symbol-attack, a public psychoanalytical seance, unmasking and revealing the unconscious of the building, its body, the 'medium' of power.

Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Public Address*

What is an art intervention? It implies a reversal of norms, an attempt to shock, destroy pretence, break apart traditions of representation to foreground the experiential, to open different kinds of engagement with meaning, to activate an audience. For instance, in performance art, it typically subjects an audience to alternative, confusing, obscure, alien or otherwise abnormal mindsets, attempting to 'intervene' with their normal thought processes. It is a concentrated essence of an oppositional concept – without the familiar constellation of givens set up to ingratiate the viewer in a context – organised to instigate a disequilibrium in an established system of thought, behaviours, conventions. The Institute of Applied Autonomy describes this as follows, "Interventions change the behavior of a system in a way that the system is not prepared to deal with". Art interventions have both an oppositional element, a sense of conspicuous negation, of tearing something down (through demystification, deconstruction); and also a productive element, a sense of producing or activating a new set of conditions, revitalising an ossified set of relationships and reconfiguring it as a fluid set of relationships. Perhaps the most dynamic interventions transcend this binarism, synthesising an amalgam of both tendencies, its creative force imbued in a radically penetrative criticality.

An art intervention is usually dematerialised, often ephemeral, interactive, post-autonomous, post-studio art, as opposed to pictorialist or 'retinal' art. Intervention is predicated upon action, interjection into a situation, and immediate reconfiguration of relationships, as opposed to 'representation'. Thus far, 'art intervention' always seems to be the vehicle to cause change in some pre-existing, formalised art historical canon, convention or genre, as opposed to being the basis of a genre or type of art itself. More in relation to what it is against than what it is for, what constitutes an intervention is defined largely according to the viewer expectations, ideologies and exhibition conventions of its time.

How can we systematise the theorisation of art intervention? Is it oriented towards a product, an event, a reaction, a result? Is it social mores, bureaucratic structures, popular opinion, epistemes of knowledge, art-world behaviour, accepted conventions of exhibition or display that is the sphere into which we are intervening? Does it make sense to talk about art interventions in terms of success or failure? Where does the 'outside world' and the intervening of daily life into art, or art's intervening into daily life, figure into art interventions?

The term 'art intervention' immediately fast-forwards us into a conceptual (as opposed to an aesthetic) realm, as it situates art in a context of the socially constructed norms in which it is received. It implies an existing community of shared values and assumptions, in relation to which the 'interventionist' has some superior knowledge or moral code, which he/she then forcefully interjects through his/her intervention. The assumption is that had the status quo been left to its own devices, it would not have naturally come to the 'revelation' that the intervention brought about. There is a rhetoric of a vanguard around the art interventionist, with the subtext of a guerrilla, non-institutionally sanctioned, rogue element. Therefore, an art intervention is a shortcut, or a short circuit of established patterns, to expedite the reception of or exposure to a superior knowledge, perceptual clarity or paradigm shift.

What is it that is problematic about some of these assumptions, particularly that any given audience has a homogeneous set of expectations, thought processes or moral codes, all identically in need of being intervened with and in the same way? Before the oppositionality embedded in the notion of intervention is legible, one takes for granted a codified set of assumptions to be uniformly disrupted. What are the pitfalls of operating upon such totalising, generalist assumptions? In what cases would such an assumption be effective and apt, and in what cases would it be a patently contestable premise, failing to reflect the heterogeneity or unknowns of a situation? When the Situationiste Internationale disrupts mass culture with 'interventions' into daily life, is it not assuming, as does Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, that we are all affected in an identical way by mass culture, consumerism, in the same way and that we can all be uniformly corrected of its ills with such and such an 'intervention'?

'The Interventionists' at MASS MoCA in 2006

In 2006, the exhibition 'The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere' curated by Nato Thompson was launched in the gargantuan Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA), a blockbuster survey of interventionary art. Though perhaps laudable for its commitment to multifarious counter-hegemonic practices, from Institute for Applied Autonomy, Yomango, The Yes Men, Critical Art Ensemble, Spurse, etc. that might otherwise elude (for better or for worse) conventional display environs, the exhibition was ridden with an adolescent boy-like fascination with buzzing, whirring, gadgetry and gimmicks. The exhibition press release read: "these 'interventionists' continue to create an impressive body of work that trespasses into the everyday world – art that critiques, lampoons, interrupts, and co-opts, art that acts subtly or with riotous fanfare, and art that agitates for social change using magic tricks, faux fashion and jacked-up lawn mowers". Sounding more like a circus description (faux fashion, magic tricks, riotous fanfare), with a distinctly recreational tone to mollify any potential political critique, one almost expects to find Dancing Bears and a trapeze artist. It then continues with a troublingly pejorative tone, "In contrast to the sometimes heavy-handed political art of the 1980s, interventionist practitioners have begun to carve out compelling new paths for artistic practice, coupling hard-headed politics with a light-handed approach, embracing the anarchist Emma Goldman's dictum that revolutions and dancing belong together. The projects in 'The Interventionists' – whether they were discussions of urban geography, tents for homeless people or explorations of current labour practices – were often seasoned with honey rather than vinegar".

Reading more like a Barbecue Sauce TV commercial (“seasoned with honey not vinegar”) or a Dance-a-Thon jingle (“revolutions and dancing belong together”) than a description of politicised art practices, the figure of Emma Goldman is invoked as ‘authentic radical brand’ figurehead, without remotely engaging with any of her ideas, but to sanctify the recreationalisation of art activism (Emma said revolutions and dancing belong together!). I also find strange this tacit compulsion to cater to some unidentified ‘popular opinion’ that to be overtly political is undesirable, not ‘cool’ or ‘in’ – hence this justificatory tone that this MoCA exhibition was *not to be confused* with heavy-handed political art of the past (the ones lamentably seasoned with not honey, but vinegar). More befuddling is the characterisation of one of the most conservative and retrograde eras of US art – the 1980s’ ‘greed is good’ era of speculative art markets and vacuous Ab Ex paintings – as ridden with “heavy-handed political art”. I found myself asking the question, which “heavy-handed political art of the 80’s” was this press release so blithely relegating to ineffectuality, and on what basis? Artists Call Against US Intervention in Central America that took a stand against the US government’s economic, political and military interventions in Central America and mushroomed into a nationwide mobilisation? Gran Fury’s valiant agit-prop campaigns to galvanise awareness of malignant inaction to address AIDS? Guerilla Girls’ blunt protests against the lack of recognition for female artists? This blanket dismissal of “heavy-handed political art” – simultaneously myopic, reprehensibly disrespectful to the legacy to which current art is indebted, and implicitly self-congratulatory (*‘this new brand is better!’*) – smacks of quintessential Generation X complacency and entitled insulation from the struggles upon which the current status quo we take for granted was built, as well as a regressive slide into complicity with a neoliberal agenda, complete with a glib dismissal of the viability of militant politicisation. This must give us pause in terms of the seriousness with which we take the political consciousness fuelling the exhibition (not to mention the irony that one of the artists featured prominently in ‘The Interventionists’, Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko, is in fact an icon of “heavy-handed 80’s political art”, with his 1985 swastika projection on the South African Embassy building in London).

Now let us turn to how this exhibition was divided into four subcategories like a mail order J. Crew catalogue of polo shirt colours: 1. Nomads, 2. Reclaim the Streets, 3. Ready to Wear, 4. Experimental University. Once again, one is struck with a frustration that these are almost nothing more than formalist designations, skating on the surface of the superficial form of these artworks without apprehending the specific cadence and accents of their underlying concept: ‘these people create clothes’, ‘these people created mobile homes’, ‘these people did their work in the streets’. It may be true that X artist created clothes or mobile homes, or worked in the streets – is that the most crucial feature of the overarching idea of their work?

Suffice it to say, in my investigation of the epistemological basis of art interventions, I was unsatisfied with the answers given by the MASS MoCA Interventionist exhibition, which seemed infatuated with gadgetry and micro-technologies, decontextualised from any political analysis other than that they were ‘trespassing and modifying the rules of engagement’, without elaborating upon what was one trespassing, and to what end.

* * *

I will provisionally propose my criteria for an intervention as premised upon two principles, namely: 1) an act in the Kantian sense as that which defines a limit by surpassing it; 2) the only acts of institutional critique that succeed are ones that fail – their ostensible ‘failure’ is evidence that they have actually threatened the institutional power structure and could not be absorbed by it. (I use the term ‘institutional critique’ not as the reified canon of what we have come to know as ‘institutional critique’, but in a more expanded sense of any act of cultural production that bears a contestatory relationship to institutions of art.) Based on

these two principles, I will address two relatively recent cases that did not declare themselves as 'interventions', which is why I am attracted to them and their lack of 'art world packaging' as examples around which to make an argument that they were interventions: Manifesta 6 and its cancellation in 2006 and Occupy 38 in 2011.

The Cancellation of Manifesta 6

The globalisation of the art world makes for an increasingly homogenised art system, for which many fault the art biennial. As Mark Van Proyen of *Art in America* notes:

The real story of the art world in the 1990's lies in how it subtly embraced and then reversed this trend towards hyper-commodification by using the machinations of marketing to shift the focus of art patronage away from the artist and back toward the institution... The 1990's did not show its unique aesthetic hand in the emergence of any identifiable period style in the visual arts; rather it did so with a building boom in stylish museum buildings and a concomitant proliferation of the international biennial.

Whether the biennial is located in Guangzhou, Dakar, New York or Liverpool, we see a 'lingua franca' of 'multi-channel sound and video installation', 'collaborative duos', noisy hi-tech, spectacle-oriented, large-scale installation, just enough transgression to be sexy, just enough estrangement to distinguish it from mass culture, just enough ambiguity to be apolitical, all marked by a high degree of aesthetic entropy, inter-changeability and infinite reproducibility. As Julian Stallabrass notes in *Art Incorporated*:

Seen from the point of view of the art-world as a system, artworks appear as the component parts of a uniform machine, which produces a large range of novel combinations that are tested against various publics for marketable meanings...¹
The filtering of local material through the art system ultimately leads to homogeneity. This system, not just the curation but the interests of all the bodies, private and public, that make up all the alliances around the world [from] which biennials are formed, [tends] to produce an art that speaks to international concerns.²

Against this distribution of sameness, we can then perhaps contextualise Manifesta as a counter-hegemonic move away from the homogenisation of the globalised art market (while still, wittingly or unwittingly, a component of it), an impulse to locate the biennial in a geopolitically specific local context. A 'roving European biennial' that chooses a new city every two years, its original impetus was to shift the centres of art away from predictable Western European mega-cities to more peripheral zones, in some sense to revitalise culturally marginal cities and those ridden by intercultural conflict. An offshoot of European Union utopianism, this notion that art could be used as an intervention into a geopolitical situation, something perhaps mundane to Europeans, is wholly foreign and exotic to Americans, and would never happen in the United States, where art is first and foremost a commercial, careerist enterprise with only the most tenuous and strained ties to anything political.

Perhaps the only exception I can think of is Paul Chan's *Waiting for Godot* in New Orleans' 9th Ward in 2006. Chan restaged the Beckett play in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, using the six months in the lead-up to the play for intensive activist work within hurricane-ravaged New Orleans, attempting to galvanise pressure to address the Katrina aftermath. That said, the important differences between Chan's use of an art project to address Katrina refugees and Manifesta are: 1) *Waiting for Godot* was a 'one-off', a one-time project conceived by

a single artist, whereas Manifesta is an ongoing institution devoted to the use of the art biennial in dialogue with a geopolitical context; 2) Paul Chan is an activist – that is to say, someone outside culturally legitimised channels of power and action, an ‘activist’ being a marginalised, at times demonised moniker in American society – whereas Manifesta is a culturally legitimised institution. American art institutions (Creative Time, MoMA) latched on to Chan’s project largely because of his celebrity. Would they have considered it viable to do so were Chan’s celebrity not attached? The resounding answer is no.

Previous iterations of Manifesta took place in Rotterdam (1996), Luxembourg (1998), Ljubljana (2000), Frankfurt (2002), Donostia-San Sebastian (2004), with the 2006 Manifesta slated for Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus. Three people were commissioned as curators: Florian Waldhovel (a German curator), Mai Abu ElDahab (an Egyptian independent curator) and Anton Vidokle (a Russian-born, New York-based artist). Cyprus is one of the last Cold War holdovers, split into antagonistic Greek-occupied and Turkish-occupied territories. Rather than hold a traditional art object display, their concept was to hold a four-month, alternative, temporary school in the vein of Black Mountain College, particularly seeking students from North Africa and the Middle East, hoping to coalesce an art intelligentsia in a locale lacking in contemporary art infrastructure. Eschewing the usual biennial model of the globetrotting-tourist-filled playground to revive the economy with Western consumption and a neo-colonialist capitalist leisure industry, they instead wanted to invest in the building of infrastructure in the local scene of Nicosia. That is to say, they subordinated the global to the local, and anomaly for biennials.

The crux of the issue, however, was that this school was to be ‘bi-communal’, that is, held in both the Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot territories of Nicosia, with the Greek side overseen by Waldhovel and ElDahab, and the Turkish side by Vidokle. When a press conference for the school in the Turkish-occupied territory garnered positive attention before the actual start of Manifesta, the Greek-Cypriot cultural authorities at Nicosia for Art felt the weight of cognitive dissonance, as recognising the legitimacy of this school would mean recognising that of the Turkish-occupied territory. As such, they cancelled the biennial and fired the three curators, replete with recriminations and a half-million-dollar lawsuit against Manifesta.

Curiously, subsequent press accounts attribute the dissension to a case of administrative snafu, a miscommunication within the context of contracts and legalese – whereas Vidokle has said in no uncertain terms that the cancellation of Manifesta 6 was censorship.³ Press accounts seem to only be able to interpret the events with a ‘hindsight is 20/20’ condescension towards X party for not knowing better, the assumption being that the status quo was the inevitable outcome. The more interesting question for me is to imagine what would have happened if the biennial had gone through, if it had galvanised popular sentiment or planted seeds in 10 years for an eventual movement to reunify war-torn Cyprus. What would that have taken, and can we understand Vidokle’s administration of the Turkish-occupied school as a type of large-scale activism; that is to say, the harnessing of an institution of cultural production to intervene in (even destabilise) a geopolitical situation? If the answer is yes, then on whose behalf was he an activist – the Turkish-Cypriots? In a sense, two temporalities clashed – the rising tide of a pan-continental European Union utopianism temporality fuelling Manifesta, and the antagonistic, territorial, Cold War temporality of the Greek cultural authorities. By not backing down on the Manifesta school, Vidokle showed what the limit of the discourse of ‘bi-cultural tolerance’ was by exceeding it, pushing the dispositif underlying the biennial, rendering his curation of this exhibition a confrontational missile with political ramifications.

An art world based on neoliberal capitalist expansionism and ‘growth’ could only understand (if not deride) the cancelled biennial as a ‘failure’, fatuously oblivious to the wholly unusual and ambitious notion of using an art biennial to affect a 40-year-old geopolitical

situation. In an insipid display of art-world narcissism, Vidokle was chastised for 'believing he could accomplish what even the UN couldn't', or for going beyond what people usually mean by 'political art'. Ironically, every avante garde visual art movement in the West has for 90 years wrung its hands in aspiration to 'merge art and life', and when an actual instance of it happened, when a vessel of cultural production was brought into confrontation with a concrete geopolitical situation, they balked and scarcely had the vocabulary or tools to even process what happened, falling silent, inert, and cynically disengaging from the entire scenario.

Occupy 38

I shift gears now into a different landscape, that of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and the visionary 28-hour occupation of an art gallery in October 2011 that can be understood to have been an intervention into the more mainstream OWS arts groups. Before OWS began, roughly 50 people gathered at Tompkins Square Park twice a week in July and August 2011 to create the New York City General Assembly, eventually giving birth to the Occupy movement itself in September. Several of these originators, initially 10 people, eventually 200, took over Artists Space gallery in Soho, New York, an occupation named Occupy 38 (for 38 Greene Street, the gallery's address) or Take Artists Space. This fluid body of people held this space for 28 hours without the gallery's permission, leading to a tense standoff and their eventual eviction by a hired security force. Occupy 38 subsequently became a huge source of controversy, eliciting both denunciation and support within the OWS ranks and being thus a 'dividing line'.

We can look at Occupy 38 as an intervention into an orthodoxy that had started to reify around Occupy Wall Street. One of these orthodoxies was consensus process, to which many in OWS adhered with seemingly blind, evangelist fervour. Consensus is a mode of group decision-making that emphasises shared power and process over product. Rather than voting or having a black-and-white 'winner' and 'loser', it is a slow, painstaking process, aiming for many steps of incremental negotiation to achieve unanimous consent. But some involved with Occupy 38 felt that consensus had ossified into a new type of 'establishment', with facilitation training almost taking on the patina of a 'professional' caste. Some felt that the 'harmony' that OWS privileges had started to be a conservative anaesthesia that reins in surprise anti-authoritarianism or true creative action. For Gramsci, consensus was an insidious result of the ruling class' hegemony over the working class, using 'common sense' to induce seamless and almost unwitting 'consent'. For Hans Haacke, consensus was the *prima facie* product of capitalist neoliberalism, 'consensus' being the inevitable resignation to the complete corporatisation of cultural expression (*Creating Consent*, 1981). For Baudrillard, consensus was the depoliticised vacuum that the New World Order of American hegemony produced (*The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, 1991). Occupy 38 rejected the formalist tendencies of turning OWS into a governing body, or the General Assembly into a parliament.

Another persistent condemnation of Occupy 38 from certain quarters was 'How could they occupy a non-profit art space?' By its actions, Occupy 38 broached open a discursive space in which to ask, 'Is there a difference between a profit and non-profit art space today?' In Julie Ault's *Alternative Art, New York, 1965-85*, 'alternative art spaces' were an anachronism by the late 90s, mere feeders for the commercial gallery system.⁴ As Pablo Helguera notes in *Playing by the Rules: Alternative Thinking/Alternative Spaces*:

[An] alternative space rarely offers a real 'alternative' to the kind of art that is shown elsewhere. Instead, they are inextricably connected to a critical and economic fabric of the art world. By retaining their original name, alternative spaces today create a semblance of mini-subcultures that actually function closer to clearinghouses of emerging artist talent, rather than representing countercultural or underground

movements... But while this is a valid function, we should ask if that is enough to claim a role as a true conceptual and practical counterpart in the art system. I believe it is not.

Some hold that non-profits were proliferated in the post-60s US to quell social unrest into a governmentally supervised outlet, just as the New Deal staved off Communism by absorbing communisation tendencies into the Establishment. Many in OWS, naive and inexperienced in thinking about social justice issues, sanguinely attributed a halo of moral indemnity to something simply because it is a non-profit or 'alternative' space. As such, a torrent of denunciation descended upon Occupy 38 with a strange uniformity in *Art Info*, *Animal NY* and *Village Voice*. Occupy 38 was called "puerile", "freakish", "bizarre", "most hateable", an "aggressive artist group [that] botches occupation", a "failed occupation" – a testament to the intellectual conformity and subservience of the commercial art press. This witch hunt dynamic was sadly a retaliatory move instigated by the Artistic Director of the gallery himself, most explicitly targeting one of the Occupy 38 participants, performance artist Georgia Sagri. The gallery then pressured the OWS Arts and Culture Committee to disaffiliate itself from Occupy 38; as such, the committee sent 76 emails in 20 hours about 'what to do' about Occupy 38. Sounding more like a corporate Board of Directors than a group of activists, underlying this discussion was the assumption of ownership of the OWS 'brand', which they did not want tarnished. This resulted in an official statement denouncing Occupy 38 and antithetical to every principle of inclusion and horizontality for which OWS purports to stand.

Mainstream OWS art groups saw it first and foremost as a 'form' (i.e., bureaucracy) that must be systematised, normalised and rendered respectable. That Occupy 38 did not first seek 'permission' from the Arts and Culture Committee was an affront. Occupy 38 was executed under the belief that an action must catalyse a situation you cannot predict beforehand – because you do not know what will happen when a new threshold of power is threatened – not simply rehearse pre-choreographed symbolic rituals of antagonism. Many 'leaders' in mainstream OWS art groups favoured its becoming a conduit for accreditation within existing power structures: biennials and contemporary art centres worldwide, office space with art magazines, artist residencies, conference invites – essentially using OWS as a para-professional networking system. Occupy 38, on the other hand, eschewed the career-oriented approach of turning OWS into a governing body with powered interests that must be advanced through an existing system of art-world credentials.

Beginning as an act of negation against the status quo, OWS then subsequently generated a culture of vociferously celebratory affirmation, as if to over-compensate for its precarity. Leftism is deeply marginalised in the US, and it was as if OWS felt it had to make up for its 'weirdness' by being as palatable and upbeat as possible. Rejecting its pre-approved modes of speech and feel-good symbolic antagonism (mic check, consensus process, General Assembly), Occupy 38 became an 'affect alien', engaged no longer in the mere performance of antagonism, but in an assault on an institution's power structure itself. Occupy 38 was 'inappropriate speech' – a radical intervention into Occupy Wall Street that could not be assimilated, recuperated, sublimated or de-fanged. Occupy 38 did not succeed, but to even dance with this possibility enlarged the parameters and questioned the foundations of how OWS defines 'dissidence'. Indeed, it showed the hollowness of certain sanctioned forms of OWS dissidence, as well as the hollow dissidence of the 'alternative art space'.

Conclusion:

Though the cancellation of Manifesta 6 and Occupy 38 are vastly different non-equivalent entities, I see them having four traits in common. The first is that their putative 'failure' was their

success, in that they actually threatened power (unlike so much of today's subversion-for-hire, made-for-institution institutional critique). Their 'failure' was not the common understanding of failure (lack of competence), but the fact that they were operating on a vastly more ambitious plane of goals, of whose realisation they had no guarantee. Vidokle/Sagri-Occupy38 failed *because of an excess of their dynamism*, which their environment was not able to assimilate. Their thinking was ahead of that of the institution; it was strategically situated on a faultline that caused the institution to come to terms with its contradictions, and consequently the institution crushed them. Both cases were a litmus test that made everyone show their true colours and allowed us to learn things about the institutions involved that ordinarily would have taken years to glean. In this vein, they were 'heroic failures' in the sense of the uncommon risk they were willing to take. The second trait they have in common is that they both left the realm of the symbolic and entered the real. Manifesta 6 was not another gauzy kum bah yah symbolic 'dialogue' about 'bi-communal tolerance'; it turned the usually innocuous vessel of the 'art biennial' – an agent of globalisation and homogenisation – into a Trojan Horse, abruptly bringing it into direct confrontation with a geopolitical conflict. Occupy 38 was not another self-indulgent, upper-middle class, Bard/Yale/Columbia performance of antagonism fetishised by mainstream OWS art groups; it actually militantly challenged power structure (which the Gap-shopping, Starbucks-drinking, mainstream OWS political imagination was ill-equipped to deal with). The third trait they both share is they showed what a limit was by surpassing it. Manifesta 6 showed what the limit is of a cultural institution's acquiescence to the platitudes of 'cultural understanding' perpetuated by the juggernaut of the art biennial, if these platitudes actually have teeth and contradict the institutions' political self-interests. The debate over Occupy 38 showed the limit to which antagonisms will be tolerated in OWS – some are considered 'good', sanctioned and productive (i.e., permitted march); others are 'beyond the pale' (taking over a gallery). Traditionally, art is considered the 'safe space' for antagonism – where antagonism will be expressed only to be de-fanged, sublimated and recuperated for a social good. Occupy 38 superseded the symbolic 'performance' of antagonism, and gestured towards a real change in the power structure of an institution.

The fourth trait they had in common was their re-anchoring of site-specificity into the highly specific particularities of context. Site-specific art began in the 60s in opposition to the idealist space of sculpture and the logic of the monument, an "epistemological challenge to relocate meaning from the art object to, instead, the contingencies of its context".⁵ Site-specificity was rooted in the particular, the local, the unrepeatable preconditions of a site, with "the artists' deferral of authorship to the conditions of the site (including collaborators and viewers) a continued manifestation of Barthes' death of the author".⁶ With the flourishing of institutional critique, 'site-specificity' became untethered from a physical locale altogether, with the 'site' now referring to a confluence of discursive, ideological or institutional forces. As Miwon Kwon states in *One Place after Another* in reference to Serra's *Tilted Arc*:

In other words, the site is imagined as a social and political construct as well as a physical one. More importantly, Serra envisions not a relationship of smooth continuity between the art work and its site but an antagonistic one in which the art work performs a proactive interrogation – 'manifest[s] a judgment' (presumably negative) – about the site's sociopolitical conditions. Indeed, rather than fulfilling an ameliorative function in relation to the site, *Tilted Arc* aggressively cut across and divided it.⁷

However, with the rampant spawning of biennials in the late 90s and 2000s, and the gradual shift in the art world from a production-of-objects economy to a production-of-affective-

experience economy, so-called 'site specific' installation began its effulgent and syrupy slide into the proliferation of the now highly marketable 'site-specific' installation we see peppering every biennial, evidence of capitalist mobility. It dissipated into yet another benign marketing feature of the globalised art economy, eager to manufacture consumable 'difference' to break with the ever-encroaching homogenisation of place.

Vidokle's attempt to hold a bi-communal school in both the Turkish and Greek-occupied territories of Cyprus was a re-invigoration of the specificity and the critical bite of 'site' in the concept of 'site-specificity', which until now had attenuated into little more than flaccid platitude. His attempt to hold a bi-communal school in both the Turkish and the Greek-occupied parts of Cyprus could not have happened anywhere else. Similarly, Occupy 38's choice of a non-profit space to occupy made the mainstream OWS groups question their glib, naïve hagiography of the 'non-profit'; like a camera pulling back to span a whole panorama instead of only one spot, Occupy 38 made us question the role (and indeed the complicity) of non-profits in the neoliberal, globalised art economy. In this sense, both Manifesta 6 and Occupy 38 were stellar paragons of the three principles embedded in Serra's notion of site-specificity through:

1.) **Antagonism:** Antagonism towards a site is a crucial component of site-specificity. As Serra states in "*Tilted Arc Destroyed*":

Every context has its frame and its ideological overtones. It is a matter of degree. But there are sites where it is obvious that an art work is being subordinated to / accommodated to / adapted to / subservient to / useful to. . . In such cases it is necessary to work in opposition to the constraints of the context so that the work cannot be read as an affirmation of questionable ideologies and political power. I am not interested in art as affirmation or complicity.⁸

As Serra rejected the assimilative, accommodationist or affirmative relation to site in favour of one based on rupture and antagonism, Manifesta 6 and Occupy 38 made similar rejections, the site, in their case, being an art institution.

2.) **Inseparability:** Against the notion of ontologically hermetic, 'portable' sculpture that could be circulated and plopped anywhere at any time, oblivious to its context, Serra insisted that site-specific work had to be inseparable from its site. As Kwon describes:

The specificity of site-oriented works means that they are conceived for, dependent upon, and inseparable from their locations. The scale, the size, and the placement of sculptural elements result from an analysis of the particular environmental components of a given context.

But he goes on to say that "the preliminary analysis of a given site takes into consideration not only formal but also social and political characteristics of the site. Site-specific works invariably manifest a judgment about the larger social and political context of which they are a part".⁹

In this sense, Manifesta 6 and Occupy 38 too could not have happened anywhere other than where they did; they were the result of a coagulation of utterly unique factors inseparable from their site (in the case of Manifesta 6, the Turkish-Greek conflict in Cyprus; in the case of Occupy 38, an interrogation of the non-profit industrial complex in the context of Occupy Wall Street).

3.) **Unrepeatability:** Not only against the notion of portability, Serra insisted that site-specific work had to be unrepeatable. In this sense, both the cancellation of Manifesta 6 and Occupy 38 were unrepeatable events in time that captured a highly specific set of circumstances that cannot be replicated, exported or rendered 're-performable'.

Finally, the most salient point is that their putative 'failure' is what rendered them site-specific in the most acute, inimitable way possible. They could not have embodied the three principles embedded in Serra's notion of site-specificity unless they had failed. Had they 'succeeded', they would have been generic. In this sense, the only reason they succeeded – in being site-specific, in having a very pointed, confrontational agenda vis-à-vis their site – was because they also 'failed'. ■

Notes

- 1 Julian Stallabrass. **Art Incorporated** (Oxford University Press, 2004, Oxford), p. 179.
- 2 Ibid., p. 53.
- 3 Augustine Zenakos. "Manifesta No More". In **Artnet**. Available at: <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/news/zenakos/zenakos6-5-06.asp> (last accessed 20 February 2013).
- 4 Julie Ault. **Alternative Art 1965-1985** (University of Minnesota Press, 2004, Minneapolis).
- 5 Miwon Kwon. **One Place After Another** (MIT Press, 2002, Cambridge, Mass.), p. 12.
- 6 Ibid., p.31.
- 7 Ibid., p. 74.
- 8 Richard Serra (1989). "Tilted Arc Destroyed". Reprinted in Richard Serra, **Writings Interviews** (University of Chicago Press, 1994, Chicago), pp. 193-213.
- 9 Kwon, op. cit., p. 37.

CRIME, POWER AND VIOLENCE

THE NEW 'ANTI-URBAN' IN GANGS OF WASSEYPUR

Divya Vishwanathan

Still from Gangs of Wasseypur, Anurag Kashyap, 2012



*The city as a concept remained a crucial absence in much of Indian nationalism's history. The nationalists instead invested in the imagination of the villages as one of the secure sites of citizenship, reflecting the social base of anticolonial mobilisation.*¹

In Indian cinema, the urban experience and spectacle has for long dominated its imagery and narratives.

Cinema – the most influential form of mass culture

City – the most complex and ever-evolving social organisation.

The cinema-city nexus is the relationship between the reel and the real – the real as represented in the reel and the reel as experienced in the real. “Formally, the Cinema has long had a striking and distinctive ability to capture and express the spatial complexity, diversity and social dynamism of the city through mise-en-scène, location filming, lighting, cinematography and editing...”²

These representations of the real in cinema have been varying thematically. One can, therefore, see a cinema of indulgence; a cinema of expression; a cinema of truth; a cinema of fascination and so on. They create distinct mental images: a juxtaposition of ‘what is shown’, ‘what exists’ and ‘what one perceives’. Cinema, thus, gives an insight into the ‘imagined space’ by giving metaphorical meanings to experiences, spaces and real places of the city. (George Simmel explored the space between the real and the imaginary in his book, *The Metropolis and the Mental Life*.)

Our understanding of the urban and the ‘idea of urban’ in cinema has been synonymous with development, aspirations and hope. Violence, crime and the dark side of the city have been an alternative notion with a distinct topography. “In Indian cinema, the city constantly acknowledges the rural other”.³ The very first urban images in cinema were incomplete without the context of the rural. The stark difference between the two sets of images made the former stronger than the latter. The rural context or the village, therefore, has for long been the anti-urban. The ‘idea of urban’ (also read as the city) in cinema is as represented by certain symbolic physical landscapes. The sites of Bombay have continually represented Urban India. Bombay, or Mumbai, as it is now, has and will always remain ‘The City’ in Indian cinema.

In strong contrast to the continual and dominant ‘idea of the urban’ in Indian cinema, the representations of the ‘anti-urban’ have been very fluid and fleeting. These images have varied from the rural setting to the city’s semi-rural fringes (struggling to be a part of the city) to the unexplored ganglands and hinterlands. The early references of the anti-urban were narrative, but the newer ones have strong visual imagery that make them far more cinematographic and create strong mental impressions.⁴

With the changing representations of the ‘anti-urban’, the significance of the term itself has changed. The term has its own identity now. It is no longer a representation of ‘the opposite of urban’. Violence/Power/Crime/Authority/Control are all read as synonyms of the anti-urban in its recent cinematic representations. Films such as *Ishaqzade* (2012), *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012) and the like have strengthened these representations. The masses are familiar with these images, but at the same time, the majority of them are also distanced from the images’ reality. The spectator is made to believe that the landscapes shown represent a particular region of the country. There are constant reference points in the film to create these associations. These references may

be just the name of the place, the character of the physical landscape, the language, the socio-cultural setting; it may or may not be the actual physical place itself.

The relationship between these cinematic representations and the physical spaces represented is not one way. The socio-cultural milieu in these physical landscapes has defined these representations. These films, by virtue of their nature, always represent society and the outcast. The outcast, or the protagonist, is defined by his life circumstances and events. He is either the victim of society or a rebel against it. Either way, he has always been anti-mass or anti-society, and thus a very strong negative connotation is associated with this character.

Gangs of Wasseypur (Anurag Kashyap, 2012)

When two boys with plastic guns, point their barrels at each other and mouth “do ya feel lucky, punk” and shoot at each other making “bang bang” sounds, it’s just another film crazy adolescent playing in their backyard. When they mouth the same lines with real guns and shoot at each other, the genesis of Gangs of Wasseypur was formed.⁵

The film introduces Wasseypur as a village which is eventually engulfed within urbanising and expanding Dhanbad in eastern India’s Jharkhand state. Unlike earlier depictions of this region in films like *Kala Patthar* (1979) – predominantly coal mines – recent representations show a more urbanised landscape. Streets and *maidans* join the coal mines to comprise the *mise-en-scène* in *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012). What the film interestingly does is move through various time frames showing and explaining the changing anti-urban from a rural setting to the urban fringe. The events, though, are specific to the region and show the natural course of the changing anti-urban across various regions of the country.

The film is in two parts with two distinct visual narrations.

Part 1

The visuals and narratives explain the change in Wasseypur from a village on the outskirts of Dhanbad to a semi urbanised periphery. The coal mines, the rail and the gangster’s home constitute the ‘primary space’ in the film. It narrates the story of the first generation of the enmity that spans both parts of the film and the reasons for its emergence. The house is where the revenge/fight for justice is plotted. Illegal activities, power and politics are in a nascent stage here. Women are portrayed as strong but silent spectators to decision making.

Part 2

This part shows today’s Wasseypur – now a part of Dhanbad – the new ‘anti-urban’. This Wasseypur still has its roots in its past but at the same time is struggling to keep up with the pace of urbanisation. Past revenge and vengeance are inherited – not only by the next generations of the family, but in some ways by the town itself. As a result, the revenge now loses its original ‘rationale/reason’; it is more like a way of life. The rationale now is family name, honour and loyalty or just instinct. The cartography of the film represents the urban fringe. The influence of technology and media is seen in the way people operate. Aspiration for political power is now an important driver. Streets and the public domain are the primary spaces and sites of power. This in turn lends them strong associative characteristics and creates distinct memories. The politics of space and place (said and unsaid) are best read and seen in these sites.

The film uses stories of certain families to show the events/way of life prevalent in the region. The revenge of Sardar Khan becomes a reference point to describe Wasseypur and the related social issues. The feud between Sardar Khan, Ehsaan Quereshi and Ramadhar Singh represents inter-caste conflict and workers’ struggles against unfair industrialists – a social phenomenon commonly seen in these areas. The physical landscapes shown in the film make it impossible to look at the incidents or the storyline as a one-

off case in the region. The urban topography in the film has been predominantly the street, the *maidan* and similar public domain spaces as they “symbolise freedom from home and they enable constant movement and liberation from the claustrophobia of restricted and controlled urban space”. The use of the streets as the primary spatial representation renders the events in the film anonymou, but at the same time makes them strongly rooted in the context of the region. The town is structured around territorialised sites of power with visual references to the ever-increasing population density. The criminal activities do not happen in the ‘darkness’, but in broad daylight and in the public domain. This highlights the familiarity and acceptance of crime in the everyday lives of the common man here.

The secondary space in the film is the home – the epicentre of all discussions and decisions. A central courtyard – the hub of the home and clearly-separated public and private zones – constitutes the representations of the house. While the public domain is shown as an extremely masculine space, the house is the where the woman dominates. The underlying strength of the women in the film speaks of the hardships they go through and the realities they have acknowledged as inextricably part of their lives.

The new anti-urban as symbolised by cinematic representations are the small towns trying to cope with rapid urbanisation, violence, crime and expansion. The new anti-urban, therefore, comes very close to being the city of despair and darkness. Unlike the urban, the anti-urban landscapes have strong local (rather than global) attributes. The fact that the film ends with the remaining members of the family moving to the city to sever all ties with the feuds and enmity of the past underpins the idea of the urban as a site of rationality and reason. The urban fringes and the hinterlands of the country, by virtue of their representations, evoke a sense of ruin and fear. The urban, on the contrary, irrespective of the depictions of the anti-urban, does and will always represent hope, new dreams and

aspirations. The city is the new ‘secure site’ – secure from happenings in the ‘anti-urban’. ■

Notes

- 1 Ranjani Mazumdar. **Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City** (University of Minnesota Press, 2007, Minneapolis).
- 2 Mark Shiel. **Cinema and City in History and Theory**. Available at: http://media.johnwiley.com.au/product_data/excerpt/48/06312224/0631222448-1.pdf (last accessed 16 November 2012).
- 3 Mazumdar, op. cit.
- 4 Adapted from James Donald, **Imagining the Modern City** (University of Minnesota Press, 1999, Minneapolis).
- 5 Excerpts from “Director’s Note: Anurag Kashyap on Gangs of Wasseypur”. Available at http://www.wasseypurworld.com/directors_note.php (last accessed 16 November 2012). Kashyap also says: “The irony of it all was to be captured with a very spicy humor that the space inherently has. The innocence still lingering somewhere in the eyes of the misguided vengeful soul who knows no other way to live but kill, all these layers in the face of apparent violence made for a compelling epic on bumbling criminals to be made”.
- 6 Mazumdar, op. cit.

BACK TO THE FUTURE!

RE-VISIONING 21ST CENTURY PUBLIC LIBRARIES

VIA A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME AND SPACE

THE SEVEN AGES OF THE LIBRARIAN IN

GRAPHIC NOVEL STYLE

Sara Wingate Gray + Alice Corble

Kaboom! – Zap! – Pow! What might a 21st century librarian look like and what battles will she have to fight?

In today's world landscape, riddled with technology, war, attrition, peace, censorship, fragmentation and freedom, there remains a timeless character: the Librarian.

This graphic poem explores the protean 'Librarian' identity through history, from beginnings to future visions. Inspired by the stylistic vision of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, and the popularity of graphic novels in public libraries worldwide, we draw on these traditions of comic books and zines to produce a graphic narrative representing this "country of the librarian" (Irwin 1949) through the ages.

The poem that drives our graphic narrative is based on Shakespeare's "Seven Ages of Man" monologue from the play *As You Like It*, and is in Shakespearean sonnet form. Starting with the 'Scholar' Age of the Librarian, which Callimachus (the Library of Alexandria) represents, we zip through subsequent 'ages': from the religious scribes of the Middle Ages; to Edwards'/Dewey's 'Librarian' as book keeper/cataloguer or library 'economiser'; to Otlet/Shera's 'Documentationalist'; to S.R. Ranganathan's librarian 'helper'; to present-day incarnations such as Lankes' Librarian as 'community knowledge creation facilitator', arriving at the contested arena of contemporary 'Librarian' identity.

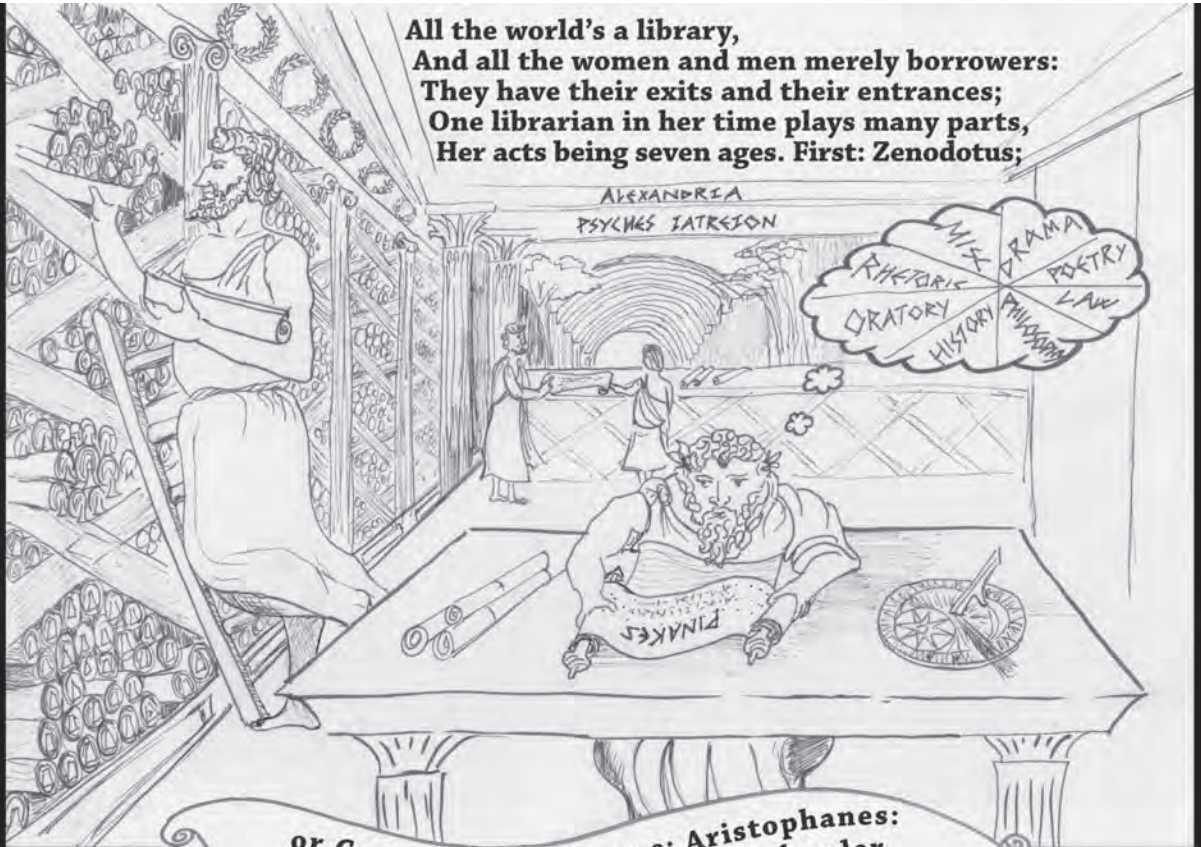
Positing that such an identity may be caught up in a values-war between traditional principles of 'citizenship' and the late 20th century's shift to a democracy of consumerists (not to mention prevailing cultural stereotypes), our graphic poem ends by projecting a radical new vision of a 21st century librarian: one who builds people and communities, crossing borders through time and space. ■

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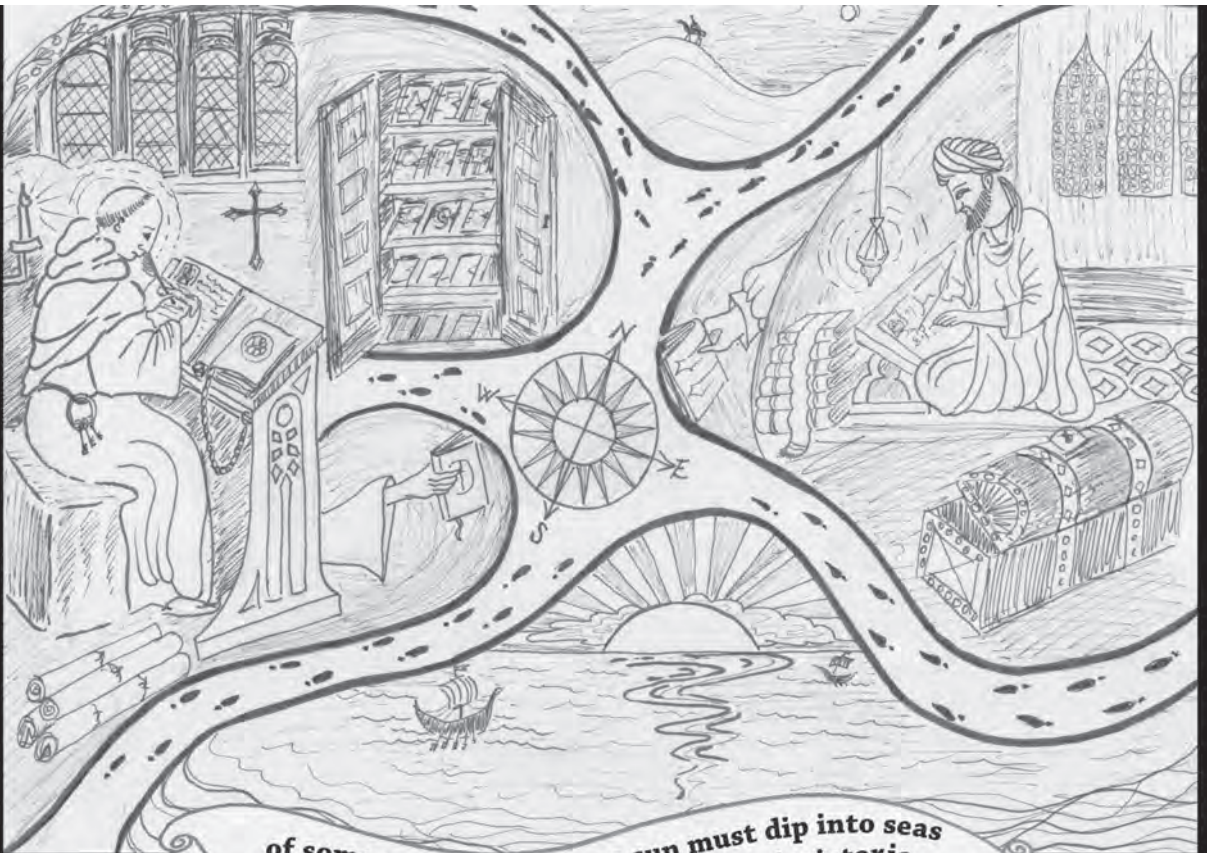
**All the world's a library,
And all the women and men merely borrowers:
They have their exits and their entrances;
One librarian in her time plays many parts,
Her acts being seven ages. First: Zenodotus;**

ALEXANDRIA
PSYCHES IATREION

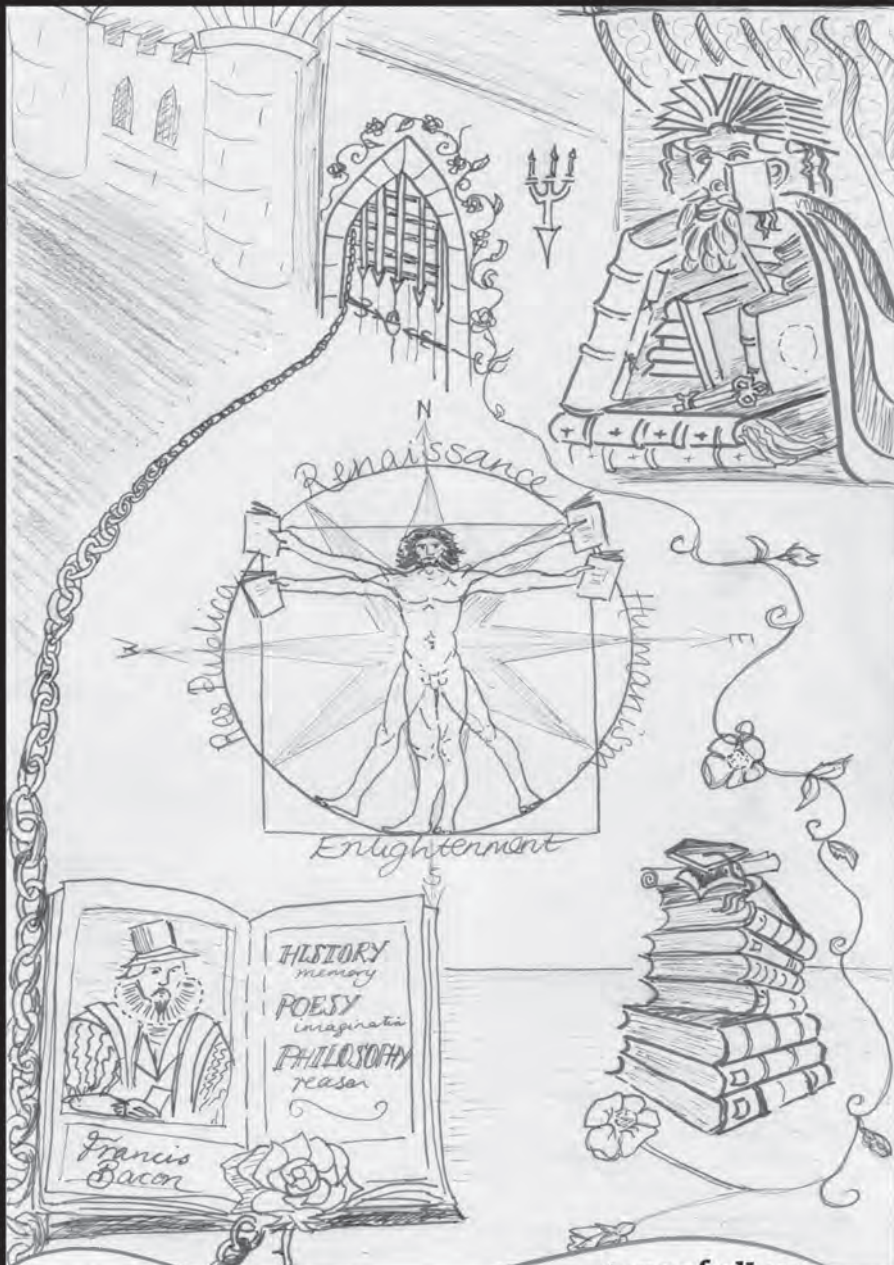


**or Callimachus of Cyrene; Aristophanes:
Greek poets, classifiers, augurs of order**

I



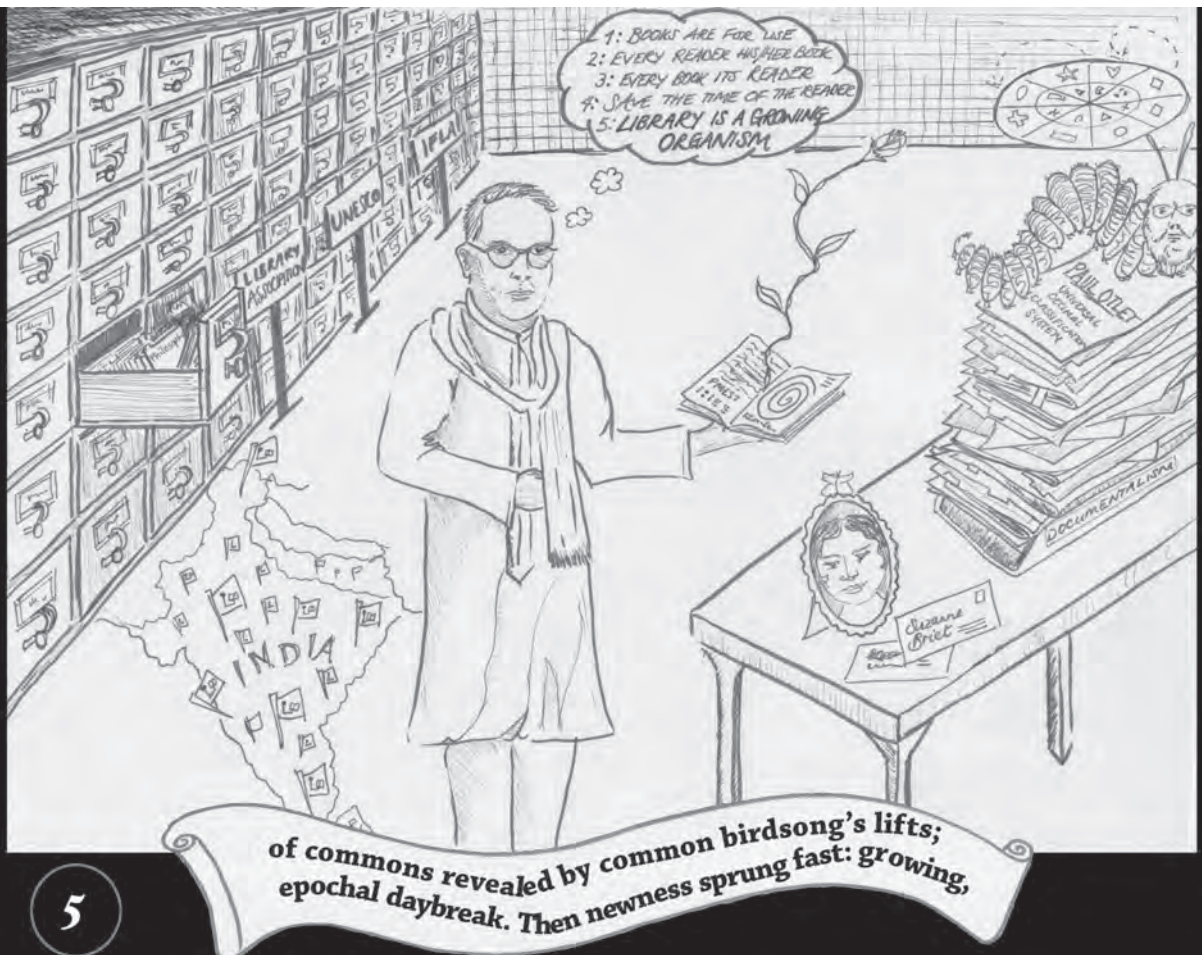
of some golden age, whose sun must dip into seas
dark as the iron gall ink of a monk's Scriptoria,

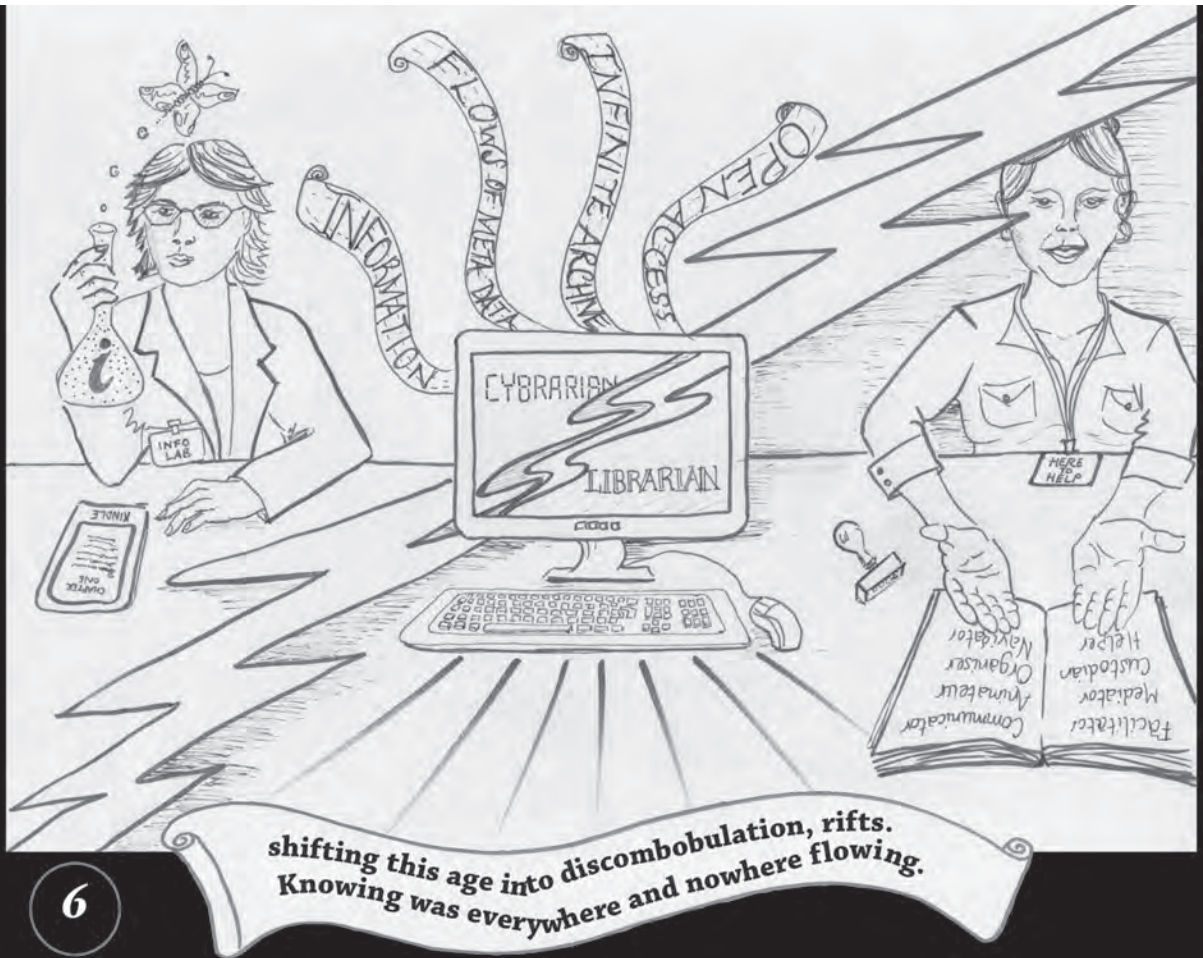


before rising, as with the secret motions of all things,
now trading colours: rubric, incarnadine, a white



light calling faster the song this sunrise sings,
the sound becoming a vast public hymnal sight







Ending this strange eventful history, one last scene,
world freedoms-fighter: The Librarian, on and off-screen.

READING THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY 'HERE' AND 'NOW'

Runa Das Chaudhuri

Were one ever to list the greatest 'show-you-your-wrongs' books, *The German Ideology* (1845-46) by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels would surely take pride of place. In it, the entire polemical mass of German philosophy, its fathomless abyss of abstract, static concepts, weathers Marx's tirade. "Wrong ideas"¹ are countered by "practical"² ones, a clarificatory move with a clear message – repudiate ideological distortions, and be rid of "illusions of consciousness".³ This is not to suggest that the relation of ideology to the non-ideological can be interpreted as "the general relationship between error and truth. Ideology does not cover all kinds of errors and distortions... Ideology is a specific kind of distortion, which conceals contradictions that stem from their existence. Hence it can only disappear when contradictions which gave rise to it are resolved in practice".⁴ It is another matter, though, if ideology as (distorted) contradiction interpreted as error coincides with the fear of error itself. Let us examine one such instance.

In the West Bengal Assembly elections of 2011, in Marx's land of little communities devoted to Kanuman,⁵ the Communist Party of India (Marxist) – the CPI(M) – and the Trinamool Congress (the TMC) were fighting for mandate, both looking, in their own ways, to usher in a "world-historical"⁶ moment. Of the two, the CPI(M) took to an exercise of seeking self-redemption for 'mistakes', claiming, akin to Vladimir Lenin, that there was the danger of

'diversion' from the 'correct path' because the party had "far from settled accounts with the other trends of revolutionary thought".⁷ Lenin's prescription, however, was for a party "only in the process of formation",⁸ which could hardly describe the CPI(M) in West Bengal, which had ruled the state for 34 years. Hence, the immediacy with which the professed followers of Marxist ideology in West Bengal clamoured to acknowledge mistakes makes it an interesting site to revisit the 'rectified' notion of ideology and the political rhetoric woven around it. More so since the Left Front was keen on making corrections at a time when the winds of change from the TMC were touted as having deflected the state's political morale. For his part, Marx in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* – a publication of now almost biblical impact, appearing a couple of years after *The German Ideology* – had had harsh words for conservative bourgeois socialists, maintaining that they "want all the advantages of modern social conditions without the struggles and dangers necessarily resulting therefrom. They desire the existing state of society minus its revolutionary and disintegrating elements".⁹ Manifestos have a compelling power in essaying political rhetoric, and so, in this paper, I seek to read the paraphernalia of election manifestos, press releases and media reports in the backdrop of the 2011 West Bengal elections, to learn what gets 'projected' as a supposedly brow-beaten, battered notion of ideology 'here' and 'now'.

I

One of Marx's chief contentions in *The German Ideology* was to identify the materialist conception of history, with men as "producers of their conceptions".¹⁰ For him, "it is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness".¹¹ Marx opined that "all forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism, by resolution into 'self-consciousness' or transformation into 'apparitions', 'spectres', 'whimsies', etc., but only by the practical overthrow of the actual social relations which gave rise to this idealistic humbug" (emphasis added).¹² Ironically, the staunch adherents of the Communist ideology in West Bengal appeared to be struggling with an eschatology of the present. Or else the opening sentence of their manifesto for the 2011 Assembly elections would not have announced them as being held against "the backdrop of an *abhutapurba* [unprecedented] crisis in the nation and the world".¹³ The shameless surrender of the nation to American capitalism, the escalating number of farmer suicides, the black market, rampant unemployment *et al.* are the disasters the manifesto outlines. None seem novel, not at least by the repeated, almost routine, reference made to them over the years. It seems as if "the phantoms formed in the brains of Bengali Marxists"¹⁴ through endless word-play are "sublimates of their material life-processes... empirically verifiable and bound to material premises".¹⁵ The abstraction of a predated and predominating state of material existence is a matter of descending from "heaven to earth",¹⁶ i.e., from mere abstraction to empirical reality. It observes Marx's notion of "setting out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process".¹⁷

To return to the word-under-dispute, *abhutapurba*, it now appears as a 'screen memory',¹⁸ if we are to remember that it found its idiomatic expression way back in 1977, in the CPI(M)'s first election manifesto, the *Bampanthi Fronter Sadharan Nunotama Karmasuchi* (Common Minimum

Programme of the Left Front). The document stated, "Men have come out into the open, staunchly protesting against the *abhutapurba* reign of terror unleashed during the dark days of the Emergency. The manner in which the masses have been suppressed over the past twenty months is unparalleled".¹⁹ The Emergency indeed was unprecedented, not so the crises outlined in the 2011 manifesto. Thus the editorial in a popular Bengali daily quipped, "Are we then to trace this *abhutapurba* crisis as a soliloquising Freudian slip, as an existential dilemma facing the Left party wary of losing mandate?"²⁰ In a sense, this dissolves Marxian *praxis* in favour of an apotheosis for mental conjurations. The *bhutapurba* in the *abhutapurba* refers to an *a priori* state: *bhuta*, i.e., a past condition, and *purba*, meaning before – a past prior to a before, or simply a past before a past. Apparitional as this state is, the disinclination to be implicated in a mental coup is found in the urgings to put things right. Accordingly, one reads in the manifesto of the difficulties faced: "In this new road, just as big successes have come our way, so too have we been halted by temporary mistakes and weaknesses. Correcting those faults, we have charted our journey on this new road".²¹ This may seem transformational, but one can at no point gloss over an amateurish teleological reading of the CPI(M)'s own historical trajectory; it only serves to add to their telling political vulnerability. Because all the Marxists in Bengal found worthwhile was to fall back on the principle that their world-view had to be changed from the outside by objectively 'interpreting' a fixed reality.

Here it would be interesting to ask how Marx had envisaged 'change' in the scheme of *The German Ideology*. In its first section, entitled "Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner", Marx had written, "...men developing their material production and their material intercourse *alter*, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking" (emphasis added).²² A few pages later, commenting on the nature of human activity, he

speaks of a “reshaping of nature by men. The other aspect [is a] reshaping of men by men...”²³ And Marx’s Thesis XI on Feuerbach holds, “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it”.²⁴

These excerpts from Marx’s text of transition, *The German Ideology*, show layers in the notion of change, in the quality of difference sought. Marx notes, “Both for the production on a mass scale of the Communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an *alteration* which can only take place in a practical movement, a *revolution*; the revolution is necessary, therefore... because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew”.²⁵ So, ‘alteration’, in Marx’s vocabulary, refers to a modification without changing something *in* the

approximating *dislocation*, *reorganisation* and *displacement* respectively, are then all fundamentally geared to ushering in a more invasive change, namely revolution. In the fullest sense, ‘revolution’ refers to the cataclysmic leap from one mode of production to another. For the mass of men congealed in particular classes, this would mean “a convergence of conflicts: between old institutions and new productive forces straining for freedom, and, less impersonally, between higher and lower classes within the old order, and between the former and a new class growing up to challenge it, until at the level of socialist revolution, the old exploited class and the new dominant class are identical”.²⁶ A corollary to the latter principle is the fact that *change* changes the class of people who seek it. And Marx accordingly noted in his third thesis on Feuerbach, “The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be

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Alteration is a sine qua non for revolution; a corollary is the fact that change changes the class of people seeking it. So the quest for redemption cannot necessarily redeem its substitution value in anything other than an amendment within.

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object, retaining something of an enduring nature inside that might not essentially change. A reshaping suggests a shaping of the already shaped, a makeover, in short. *Change* necessarily abandons an *a priori* state of existence, trading it for a complete overhaul, or ‘a substitution of one thing for another’.

The Communist revolution as the penultimate desirable outcome of a materialist conception of history is preceded by ‘an alteration’ and succeeded by the need to ‘found society anew’. Alteration, albeit on a mass scale, is then an absolute sine qua non for a revolution to occur; and revolutionary fervour, in turn, preconditions a complete reshaping of society. The axioms on *alteration*, *reshaping* and *change*,

conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*”.²⁷ So the quest for redemption cannot necessarily redeem its substitution value in anything other than an amendment within.

It is doubtful to what extent the ideology-strapped Bengali Communists engaged in so austere an exercise,²⁸ despite the directive Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya issued to his party workers to “accept mistakes committed on their part”.²⁹ But “the fear of error is... the error itself”.³⁰ The incessant procrastinations, the endless precautions, which characterise the West Bengal Communists’ *modus operandi* encapsulate the Hegelian formula perfectly: “the fear of error which conceals its opposite, the fear of Truth”.³¹

II

The real scholastic doubt in this political conundrum is not to question the intentions of the CPI(M), but to enquire whether, with all their lofty ideological claims, they had come to possess a spurious quality that made them spuriously self-critical and particularly incapable of working in change. Six years after *The German Ideology*, Marx in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) harped on self-criticality as a salient feature of proletarian revolution. He remarked, “proletarian revolutions, such as those of the nineteenth century, engage in perpetual self-criticism, always stopping in their own tracks; they *return* to what is apparently complete in order to *begin it anew*, and deride with savage brutality the inadequacies, weak points and pitiful aspects of their first attempts”.³² The history of Communist revolutions in the 20th century – an example being China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution – showed that a finality in what is understood as ‘correct thought’ can indeed be arrived at, even if with eerily Orwellian aspects. The professed *atmasuddhi* sought by the CPI(M) emerges as little but a controlling strategy to secure a ‘rectified’ ideology. The issue is not to condemn the Nandigram massacre, but to denounce the manner in which the CPI(M) top brass were keen on attending to a misplaced sense of redemption only in name. Deliverance requires a deliverer, but if the latter is steeped in pernicious designs, then any project of redemption is bound to prove futile.

In tracing the specific incapability of the Left Front to herald in change, one finds that there was a subtle yet crucial displacing as per the motor of change. In its almost impulsive announcement of ‘new roads’, the operative principle seemed to be ‘change’, not the people ushering it in. Marx, were he available to comment, would surely have pointed to the missing note of volition on men’s part to bring about change. All that such a synthetic proclamation served to augur, somewhat paradoxically, were Marxists reifying the relation of men to the objective world. Marx’s Thesis XI on Feuerbach is instructive here because what emerges is that Bengal’s

Marxian ideologists had fallen short in comprehending reality. Where “a philosophy that has reached adequate self-consciousness abolishes itself and turns into reality... [the] dialectical crux of the matter is that the abolition of philosophy presupposes a prior development of a philosophy that will be sophisticated enough to comprehend reality adequately”.³³ As far as the transcendence of philosophy is concerned, Marx’s Thesis XI is known to bear a striking resemblance to Count August von Cieszkowski’s work, *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie* (1838). Cieszkowski wrote, “Practical philosophy or, more correctly, the philosophy of *praxis*... this is the future fate of philosophy”.³⁴ The young CPI(M) (unlike its mature avatar) had in its initial phases indeed encouraged a lively *praxis*. But ‘now’, what the Left Front took to be political speech was getting depoliticised, denaturalised, lacking the vigour to ‘act’. And since the material elements of a complete revolutionary language was lacking, it was immaterial, to put it in Marx’s words, “whether the *idea* of this revolution has been expressed a hundred times already”.³⁵ For the citizen, the Idea of this idea translated into his simulated existence, captured best in the lively consumption of newspapers, manifestos and other media. It is now important to explore the appropriation of these mediated mutinies expressed passionately in political literature.

Ironically, the TMC had ostensibly hijacked the catchword ‘change’ and harped on its political potential, legitimising and projecting the common interests of all members of society in an ideal form. Change was the crux to the entire campaign of Barrack Obama; other parts of the globe too witnessed protests and insurrections, whether with the Arab world catapulting itself into the Jasmine Revolution, or with the Eurozone coming under the scanner of a much-needed change from their financial coup d’état. The TMC’s manifesto uses the word *paribartan*, meaning change, 13 times in its first 12 pages, undersigned by party chief Mamata Banerjee. Change as a term has been rehashed with ‘reconstruction’, ‘regeneration’, ‘rejuvenation’, ‘resurgence’, ‘revival’ – until

it was made to sound synonymous with Renaissance. “We will return to our roots to go forward to build the new future – a better and brighter tomorrow for all”, stated the TMC manifesto.³⁶ Vouching for an all-round revolution, if one may so put it, the TMC seemed all set to overcome continuity and the status quo, and bring about the *paribartan* *jhod* or ‘the storm of change’. We now need to scrutinise the meaning of change vis-à-vis revolution in this very ‘revolutionary’ setting.

III

Incidentally, it was yet another scene of revolution, the Egyptian upheaval that led to the end of Hosni Mubarak’s three-decade-old dictatorial regime, which was projected in Bengal politics. Addressing an electoral campaign on 12 February 2011, CPI(M) state secretary and Left Front chairman Biman Bose offered his *Laal Salaam* (Red Salute) to the Egyptian people, but hastened to condemn those who were comparing the Egyptian situation to Bengal. The latter

wanted a re-run, but what is lamentable is that the CPI(M) were unknowingly parodying their own demise.

Amid the host of ideas on ‘turning back’, ‘return’ ‘reappearance’ that circulated, there remains the need for an impact ascertainment, the valuation of abstract thought that Marx’s Thesis XI asks for; the test of the validity of ideas, after all, is in their capacity to transform the world. The ruling CPI(M) had come to be possessed by the thought that the Communism they practiced was insurmountable. The TMC, on the other hand, was convinced that people have only to change their consciousness to make the world all right. This is akin to Marx’s critique of Max Stirner who “believes Don Quixote’s assurance that by a mere injunction he can without more ado convert material forces arising from the division of labour into personal forces”.³⁸ In West Bengal too, there appeared every possibility that circumstances would enable “a grotesque mediocrity to strut about in a hero’s garb”.³⁹ What was not being recognised is that “the real, practical

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insinuation was incited by Mamata Banerjee’s remarking, “The Egyptian dictator has been toppled after thirty years. We too could have followed the example. But we have faith in democracy. So we will fight it out through the ballot”.³⁷ While the CPI(M) understood change as a victory of the masses against a dictator, their rival, while calling for a renaissance, was also endorsing a ‘return’ in complying with a constitutional democracy. Suffering from having lost proprietary rights over the word *paribartan* to the TMC, the CPI(M) now took to a neologism, *pratyabartan*, a ‘reappearance’. Both parties

dissolution of these phrases, the removal of these notions from the consciousness of men will... be effected by altered circumstances, not by theoretical deductions”.⁴⁰ It is true that the TMC wanted an alteration, but the mere dislocation, and not the dissolution, of one consciousness by another carried little promise.

Revolution is a change, but it is at the same time a return. The specificity of this return is that it is not only “irresistible”,⁴¹ but that in its very recurring is embedded a dual sense of restoration and a new becoming. The TMC played on this dual

logic. But the idea of restoration as a requisite in retrieving lost glory prevailed over the sense of a new dawn. Revolution was rendered a mere alteration, a naturalised change purged of its rebellious zeal. We will turn back to Marx's idea of ideas as "the conscious expression – real or illusory – of their real relations and activities, of their production, of their intercourse, of their social and political conduct".⁴² By stating that ideas can be real or illusory expressions of practice, Marx introduces a criterion of distinction which is based upon the adequacy of that expression. Ideology is to do with those ideas which express practice inadequately or is the outcome of men's "limited material mode of activity".⁴³ In so far as the TMC's idea of practice is inherently flawed, what one can lay hope on is that only the possible happens. History is Necessity, Hegel has taught us; historical outcomes might not tally with revolutionary desire or insurrectionary will, for these are determined by possibilities in society at large. Men can change their own history but, as history would have it, not just as they please. There remains every possibility that the grand narrative of a projected change will falter, with hopeless impasses in alterations being taken for new arrivals. ■

Notes

- 1 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. **The German Ideology** (Progress Publishers, 1976, Moscow), p. 29.
- 2 Ibid., p. 44. Marx opined that for the "practical materialist", i.e., the Communist, it is a question of practically coming to grips with and changing the things found in existence.
- 3 Ibid., p. 36.
- 4 Jorge Larraín. **Marxism and Ideology** (Macmillan, 1983, Houndmills, UK), p. 30.
- 5 Karl Marx. "The British Rule in India" (New York Daily Tribune 3804, 25 June 1853). In **Marx Engels Collected Works, Vol. 12** (Progress Publishers, 1979, Moscow), p. 132.
- 6 Marx and Engels, op. cit., pp. 56-57. I have borrowed Marx's idea of the 'world-historical' in so far as it approximates to actual empirical existence world-historically instead of a mere local being.
- 7 Vladimir Lenin. **What is to be Done** (1902). Available at: www.marxists.org/archive/Lenin/works/1901/witbd (last accessed 18 February 2013).
- 8 Ibid., p. 12.
- 9 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. "Manifesto of the Communist Party". In **Marx/Engels Selected Works, Vol. 1** (Progress Publishers, 1975, Moscow), p. 59.
- 10 Marx and Engels, **The German Ideology**, op. cit., p. 42.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid., p. 61.
- 13 "Paschimanga Panchadash Bidhansabha Nirbachan, 2011: Bamfronter Ishtehar [The Fifteenth West Bengal Assembly Elections, 2011: The Left Front's Manifesto]" (Paschimanga Bamfront Committee, 2011, Kolkata), p. 3.
- 14 Marx and Engels, **The German Ideology**, op. cit., p. 42.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 I have subscribed to the Freudian notion of 'screen memory', the preservation of which owes not to its own content but to an associative relation between its content and another which is repressed. Here, the indifferent impression of recent date, namely abhutapurba, established itself in the memory as a screen memory, although it owes that privilege merely to its connection with an earlier experience, the reign of terror following the Emergency, which resistances prevent from being reproduced directly.
- 19 "Bampanthi Fronter Sadharan Nunotama Karmasuchi, 1977". In **Ishtehare Bamfront: Paschimbanger Bidhansabha Nirbachane Bamfronter Ishteharer Samkalan 1977-2006 [Left Front Manifestos: A Compilation of Manifestos of State Assembly Elections in West Bengal, 1977-2006]** Bharater Communist Party (Marxbadi), Paschimanga Rajya 22nd Sammelan, 2008, p. 6.
- 20 "Abhutapurba [Unprecedented]", editorial. In **Anandabazar Patrika**, 21 March 2011, p. 4.
- 21 "Paschimanga Panchadash Bidhansabha Nirbachan, 2011: Bamfronter Ishtehar", op.cit., p. 10.

- 22 Marx and Engels, **The German Ideology**, op. cit., p. 42.
- 23 Ibid., p. 58.
- 24 Ibid., p. 617. The act of 'interpreting' in this thesis has a very strict meaning; 'interpretation' here stands for a 'style of thinking' which is fundamentally antithetical to change. 'Interpretation', by its own terms of reference, cannot comprehend change.
- 25 Ibid., p. 60.
- 26 V.G. Kiernan. "Revolution". In (ed.) Tom Bottomore, **A Dictionary of Marxist Thought** (Maya Blackwell, 2000, New Delhi), p. 476.
- 27 Marx and Engels, **The German Ideology**, op. cit., p. 616.
- 28 The exercise of seeking redemption by Bengali Communists has often invited ridicule. An editorial in **Anandabazar Patrika** titled "Paribartan [Change]" on 1 April 2011 read, "It would be a blatant denial of truth if one says that the leaders of Communist parties do not admit their mistakes. Only they admit ten, twenty or fifty years later and even come clean on 'historical blunders'".
- 29 In a report titled "Natamastake Bhul Shudre Newar Nirदेश Buddha [Buddha's directions to bow down heads and rectify wrongs]" in **Anandabazar Patrika**, 14 February 2011, p. 1, the Chief Minister was quoted, "We have to rectify errors committed. Some party leaders and workers have committed mistakes. They have wronged. Many party leaders and workers have done good work. But the party has been maligned for the wrongs of a few. That is why I am saying that do not force yourselves on the people. Bow down your heads, accept blames and rectify wrongs".
- 30 Slavoj Žižek. **The Sublime Object of Ideology** (Navayana, 2008, New Delhi), p. 190.
- 31 Ibid., p. 191.
- 32 Karl Marx. **The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte**, (trans.) Terrell Carver. In (eds.) Mark Cowling and James Martin **Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire: (Post)modern Interpretations** (Pluto Press, 2002, London, Sterling, Va.), p. 22.
- 33 Sholmo Avineri. **The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx** (Cambridge University Press, 1969, London), pp. 136-137.
- 34 Cited in Avineri, *ibid.*, p. 129.
- 35 Marx and Engels, **The German Ideology**, op. cit., p. 62.
- 36 The English version of the TMC manifesto stated the need to go back to the 'thoughts and philosophy' of Rabindranath and Kaji Nazrul Islam; to draw on the 'powerful words and deeds' of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and the 'work' of Jagadish Chandra. Having arranged for a blissful union of a new awakening to the Golden Old, the TMC saw every reason to wait on an impending dawn of the new. The 'action agenda' for the first 200 days, spelled, "Our aim is to launch a massive program for turning around the rural economy of West Bengal based on significant enhancement of agricultural productivity and a new agro processing revolution" (p.45). The Bengali version harped on the aim to "usher in a Green Revolution in industry. On the one hand, this Green Revolution would mean environment-friendly, eco-friendly industry, and on the other, stand for agro-based, employment-generating industry" (p.19). English and Bengali versions of the TMC manifesto available at <http://aitmc.org/ishtahar.php> (last accessed 4 November 2012).
- 37 "Mubarakke Niye Ebar tanantani Bame-Mamatai [The Left and Mamata tugging Mubarak]". In **Anandabazar Patrika**, 14 February 2011, p. 9.
- 38 Marx and Engels, **The German Ideology**, op. cit., p. 363.
- 39 Karl Marx. **The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte**, (trans.) Eden and Cedar Paul, (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1926, London), p. 18.
- 40 Marx and Engels, **The German Ideology**, op. cit., p. 64.
- 41 Hannah Arendt. **On Revolution** (Penguin Books, 1984, Harmondsworth UK), p. 42.
- 42 Marx and Engels, **The German Ideology**, op. cit., p. 41.
- 43 Ibid.

LIVING IN VIRTUAL LANDS

SOME REFLECTIONS ON VIRTUAL GEOGRAPHY

Meera Baidur

Virtual environments, or ‘virtual realities’ as they are popularly known, constitute our world and identity within technology almost as much as technology constitutes our reality. Through the interface screen of a high-speed computer, virtual reality projects us into a virtual ‘world’. Though we tend to think of games played on the computer as a unique example of a virtual environment, there are many such interfaces, as may be found in banking, online forums for teaching, webinars, computer-simulated training systems, telepresence surgery and even virtual corporations. But the fast-growing world of computer games captures for us many interesting aspects of a virtual world, and is also perhaps one virtual phenomenon that many ordinary people participate in every day.

Three key features of virtual reality as described by Heim (1998) – immersion, interactivity and information intensity – are integral to the technology of computer games.¹ We can understand these features as a set of relationships between an identity (i.e., the virtual self) and the virtual environment within the game, determined by the real player sitting at the screen. The real player projects herself into the game through *immersion*. Immersion is a process by which one projects oneself out of this body and into the virtual world by isolating certain senses (particularly the visual and the auditory) and body parts (hands and fingers). In simpler terms, it refers to a state of being so involved with a game that one forgets the physical world. While immersion – such as in an art work or while reading a book – is a common enough phenomenon for any human being, virtual immersion,

particularly “tactical immersion” (Adams 2004) has some unique features.² A good game, immersively speaking, not only allows you to project yourself within it, but also provides a set of feedback loops for the game to respond to your virtual actions and instructions. Certain senses, such as the visual and auditory, are acutely used, while others, such as the tactile, are completely absent. In the absence of a tactile body that negotiates the everyday geography of our world, it is interesting to see how some online games replicate the process of a virtual self negotiating a virtual geography. Not only that, games that require a player to play as herself, i.e., as a character in the game narrative, have to create an entire world for the player to engage with, one capable of capturing and retaining her attention over time, again and again.

This essay takes a look at the projective world of online video games based on the author’s own experience of playing a popular virtual game, *CastleVille* (henceforth referred to as *CstV*).³ This game is a type of the fantasy genre, described by Dovey and Kennedy (2006) thus:

The fantasy genre can be characterized by this sense of authorial and reader attention devoted to the detailed realization of the imaginary world and all its features at the expense of narrative tension, character development, relationships or subjectivity. This culturally determined attachment to the topography of imaginary worlds can be found deep at work in the design and manufacture of computer games to this day.⁴

Such games rely on “narrative immersion” as Adams calls it: “[a] player gets immersed in a narrative when he or she starts to care about the characters and wants to know how the story is going to end”. The stories are replete with game elements that are visually rich with lots of game properties relevant to the narrative. There are at least two love stories in progress in CstV as subplots. One of the first pre-requisites of this type of game genre is the way one is allowed to enter this imaginary virtual world as a virtual self.

Avatar: Projections of the Self

Real players must somehow enter into the virtual world or immerse themselves in the game. This is not only a question of having superior technology that allows this to happen, but also requires the willing intention of the game player to suspend involvement in her physically embodied state. As Hillies (1999) suggests:

... users [must]... in Cartesian fashion... imaginatively set their bodies aside to enter a virtual world and in a sublimatory, almost re-medievalised fashion, merge with the display.⁵

The virtual projection of one's self into a gaming self is called the ‘avatar’ and happens through either a first person immersion or through an on-screen cartoon-like representation. While some games have fixed characters that players can embody, others allow a player to enter the game as an individual self. The on-screen character in such cases is customisable to a certain extent, which typically includes choices regarding gender (mostly of only two kinds), skin tone, body type, hair, clothes and accessories.

This virtual self that is the projection of my avatar on the screen is controlled by me through both the keyboard and more particularly the mouse, which acts as a sensory neuron in click-and-point type games. The feedback information to the real player is provided through a single-sense perception

that is visual input. The real player in the real world becomes a part of the input of the virtual self, using her hands and the synaptic pointing device to click the character into the direction for movement or turning or facing. This intervention of the player self on the game self is spatially oriented by the virtual world on the screen display.

The continuous coding-in of the game player creates a sense of being in the game landscape. In games where the first-person view is replaced by an overview, a sense of detachment prevails. The avatar is an extension of oneself, a player in the game world, but one is not completely the avatar. Players, however, tend to refer to themselves as agents of the game. I find myself saying, “I have to harvest my crops and feed my sheep” (virtually, is what I actually mean).

The Virtual landscape: Projections of Geography

A new emphasis on space rather than time has been one of the characteristics of New Media Studies – the importance of space for using and understanding computer media.⁶

The surface of the virtual world is essentially flat with three-dimensional images of the various elements laid on the basic surface. The landscape of these games is flat with no indication of slopes. Mountains or cliffs are used only as the background in the sky area and not the playing area. I suggest that this is like a tabletop model of the virtual universe viewed from an angle of a person seated at a slight height from the table. This view of the game universe is not a first person view from the ground nor is it a view from high above, like a god's eye view. Instead, like an architect's model on a table viewed from a few feet above the surface, it is partially a top-down view and partially a view from the side. This brings in a certain element of reality to the game that allows the player to keep track of the avatar inside the game and at the same time experience the notion of a real world where taller things

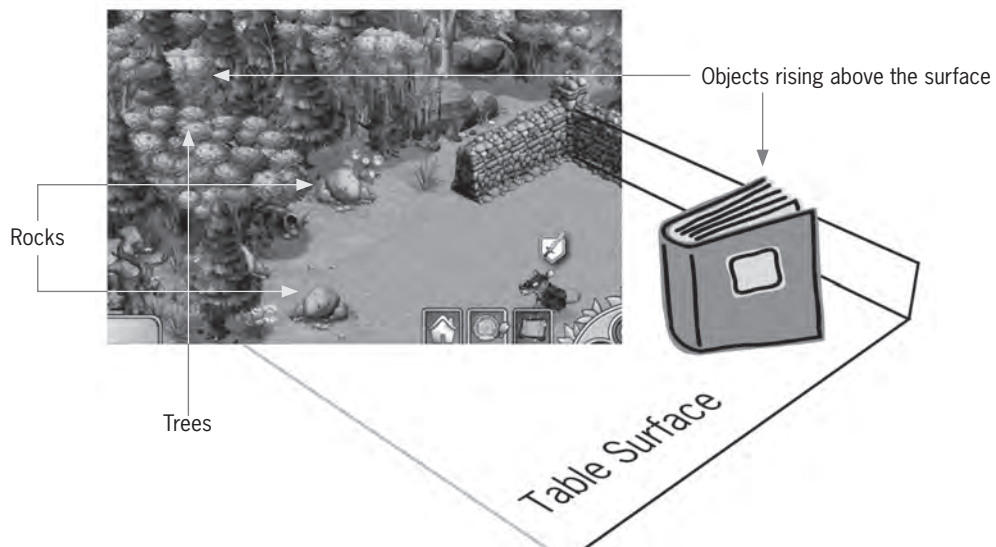
block our view of smaller things behind them. Vivek, who is a software professional, had this to comment:

One of the main reasons they use the desktop-like view is because this is 3D Isometric projection: there is no perspective, and heavy 3D calculations are not necessary – it is simply a 2D arena with things drawn skewed. In the 1980s, many of the 3D games on 8-bit computers used this technique.⁷

The basic surface of the virtual world is a grassy plain that allows random courtyard elements such as mud, cobblestones or charred ground to be overlaid on it. The borders of these surfaces are not clear lines, and they project a sort of natural uneven surface. Clearer surfaces, like tiles or pathway sections, create neater surfaces with lines.

The visual richness of various elements of the game is overlaid on the basic landform. Objects like trees, rocks, grass, ponds, rivers and bushes are some elements of the natural world projected virtually (see fig. 1), and there are three-dimensional walls, fences, decor items, houses and buildings that are the possible constructions. There are different variations of these elements, some of which yield resources (wood from trees, for instance); others are merely decorative. There are regular animals like chicken, sheep, goats, cows and, especially in the case of CstV, mythical creatures like unicorns, gremlins, Halloween spirits and phoenixes. One of the important overlays is the basic 'farm plot' that creates a virtual farming area in the kingdom. It helps the virtual self plant, harvest and gather crops that can be made into food, potions and other magical items. Very reminiscent of a foraging civilisation, the bushes yield berries, ponds yield fish, wells yield water and so on.

FIG. 1: Tabletop Projection Landscape



The game also generates its own subjects or non-player characters (NPCs) like George the Miner or Mia the Cook, as the play area expands. They become permanent denizens of one's kingdom and allow the player to perform different tasks that are called quests. The characters with quests are shown with a *question mark* pop-out symbol above their heads (fig. 2). When the quest is revealed, speech bubbles and dialogue or task windows communicate in words the various goals within a task.



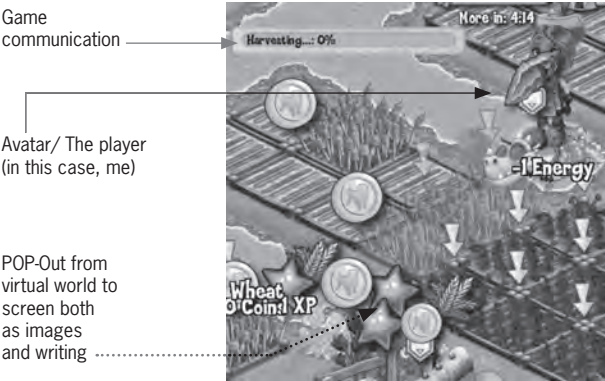
FIG. 2:
Non-player Characters

In fact, the pop-outs form a projective medium to link the real player to his virtual world. The game uses pop-up windows that it projects from the virtual world into the player screen surface to communicate with the player, who then clicks on the landscape and, in a simple mouse-over action, pings them into the virtual inventory (fig. 3). When collecting resources (like wood, crops, wool, milk, crafted items) and game elements (houses, decor, potions and gifts), a very audible ping, swish or other sounds are used to indicate the nature of the object collected. Pets also make sounds for attention. The background natural chirpings of real birds, sounds of water, the mutterings and hummings of the NPCs, workshop clangs and the magical noises of bad minions such as gloom wolves, rats or goblins also tend

to add to the immersive experience. The visual richness of this particular game has a Disney-like feel that must account for its popularity. For instance, when I am playing the game, people stop to admire the visual images on the screen that have 'cute' value.

Most of these elements that can be *placed* on the playing landscape are rotatable along the vertical axis and also have two different perspectives that we can see on the screen. An interesting projection of the behaviour of real animals is that the game grants autonomy to virtual animals to wander around randomly within the playing area if they are not fenced in. The placement of these elements on a landscape is determined by the space a particular virtual object can occupy. That is to say, only one virtual object may be placed at a particular virtual spot at a time. Each of these elements also possesses variable areas that they occupy on the virtual surface. When a player tries to place these virtual elements on top of each other, messages pop up on the screen explaining that there is no space for the object to be placed. The object appears with a deep red aura which changes to an orange outline and glows when there is possibility of placing it.

FIG. 3: *Pop-out from Virtual to Screen Surface*





The basic green grassland surface is the *tabletop surface* that is capable of overlays of other virtual objects. The player first begins with a limited area to play with and numerous adjoining areas that are potentially available. She earns her right to *expand* to these areas by achieving game goals (creating exploration crystals or undertaking special quests) or buying expansion using privileged money (called crowns, which can be bought online for real dollars). So, within the virtual world, the amount of landscape available for playing and placing one's virtual elements is dependent on crossing levels and completing tasks. In *CstV*, the non-playable areas are covered in 'gloom', and are projected as darker, unclear surfaces without light. Once an area is 'explored', the area shows up in bright colours and is more clear. The landscape and elements can be manipulated. The avatar, however, can walk into the border areas of the unexplored landscape, if required to move across it.

The plasticity of the placement of elements in the virtual world is good enough to give the player a dictator-like

status over the lands under her command. And the actions of the NPCs and other elements make the game restricted enough to keep the player interested. Games that rely on obstructions (like *Mario* or *Captain Claw*) have devices and powers (super jumps), where crossing such obstructions is the very goal of the game. In the typical, early, virtual-landscape type of narrative game, avatars tend to flash into the game and seldom exhibit real-world problems of getting around on foot in their virtual worlds. In today's virtual-world games of the fantasy genre, like *CstV*, the avatar traverses across the virtual landscape in the way a real person would make her way around obstacles and be obstructed by them. Sometimes the planned and unplanned landscape and buildings block or obstruct the player from randomly walking around the virtual area. My own avatar got fenced in along with my sheep and stayed in that enclosure until I unfenced a part and clicked the character out. In another case, the avatar was unable to cross a bridge when one of the NPCs was standing on it. The virtual self in *CstV* creates pathways across buildings, around fenced area and uses the bridge to go across rivers.

Our embodied condition in the real world makes possible things like orientation, focus, zoom in or zoom out, peripheral vision, etc. Our body in the real world encounters restriction to movement, hidden-from-view objects, blocked noises and all other kinds of obstructions. While the game



FIG. 4:
Gloom Areas and Playable Areas

replicates geographical obstruction virtually, in terms of movement for the avatar self, it creates an alternative view for the real player, where the obstruction is visual on the screen. Small animals tend to wander off *behind* buildings; taller buildings obstruct low-height houses; trees can block vision. The zoom in and out is an option for creating details that the player can enjoy, and the mouse can drag parts of the playing surface into view.

The planning of the landscape has plenty of choices for the player, and so each player can almost create a unique landscape of his/her kingdom. New players slowly learn to work out and plan their kingdom's layout to enable visibility, movement and non-obstructive pathways for the virtual self. The idea is to have functionality and aesthetics and to create a 'good-looking kingdom', which also has the possibility of winning game goodies in a 'kingdom of the week' contest. An important feature of this game, therefore, is the move, place and rotate function button on the player's console (see fig. 6). Players tend to first replicate real world planning in their initial attempts, setting up ideal gardens, keeping crafting areas away from their housing areas and laying out orderly or disorderly nature areas. As the player gains experience, the functional requirements result in fenced-in animals, crowded houses in rows with minimum empty space or arrangement of elements by type (all ponds together, all trees together and so on).



FIG. 5: *Virtual Self*
Blocked from Crossing by
a Pet Dragon

The Virtual Timescape: Time is Money

The projection of time in the virtual world cannot, unfortunately, be a different time. The game time-intervals are real-time for the player (who in fact invests her real time in the game). Time in the virtual world is the time taken to perform tasks, harvest natural products, craft goods, visit neighbouring kingdoms, wait for things to grow, mature and be ready for collection or use as animal fodder. What one would notice is that the instructions of the real player given by click and point are temporally queued up one by one and executed almost instantly by the game. A small bar keeps track of the percentage of tasks done (see fig. 3, the bar that says 'Harvesting'). But tasks to be performed by the game take their own specific time. Though all this is measured by the same time as in the real world, the projection of virtual time is, however, established in the virtual world by compressing the time required for various activities. Crops grow in hours instead of months; it takes about an hour to craft simple things and about eight hours for complex ones; and animals become adults after a few feedings. There are, however, some sops in this fantasy virtual world. Take the case of crops, for instance: game power-ups like fertilizers, irrigation, etc., speed up the crops and, particularly in CstV, magic spells can give instant or five-second results. Neighbours who visit you can speed up your crafting buildings. The buildings display a small clock with shaded segments to indicate how much time is left. The use of these symbols in the game is prolific – arrows, clocks, question marks, swords, clocks, mini-versions of crafted goods like stone blocks or cupcakes, neighbour icons – all of which are used to convey game status and possible actions to the game player.

The most complicated of all these projections is the idea of game economics, which is intrinsically related to time. Time becomes an interesting resource for the real player in the virtual world. The online company wishes the player to log in and play the game as often as possible. Therefore,



FIG. 6: Console to Place and Move Elements

the game uses energy renewal to link real time to game play. The energy is a strange token that converts a combination of time, money and the ability to perform game tasks into a single usable currency. One can receive it as test-tube potion gifts from activities or on visiting neighbours. The inventory can only hold 15 units. Energy units are required to perform actions in the game, and the game generates one unit per five minutes, up to a maximum of 25 units. The energy is represented by a lightning bolt in the statistics console at the top of the playing area. Since there is cap limit of 25 on the statistics bar and of up to 15 units in the inventory, ideally a player can log in every two hours to use her full energy.

The narrative progresses forwards in time. The avatar performs actions using energy from the store, but once performed or used up, the actions cannot be undone. But actions queued for execution in the game can be cancelled. As in the real world, we have the choice to change future action plans but not past ones; the game projects this temporality into the virtual world.

CstV has many other types of tokens and currencies a player can hold. Everything is displayed in the statistics bar on top of the play area (see fig. 7). The game money is available as resources from taxing houses, selling goods and performing tasks within the game. Everything in the virtual world yields coins or saleable resources after time intervals. These pop out as golden coins and have to be clicked into the inventory. One can buy some non-premium items in the virtual market using these coins.

The levels of the player are also reflected in two ways. The XP point, or 'experience point', a blue star gained for every task performed, reflects the amount of time the game has been played. If I log on to the game and, like a typical addict, spend time every two hours using up my energy, I can make about 100 XP points a day. The XP level is the virtual age of the game player, recording her every action. After achieving a certain amount of XPs, one jumps levels. As the levels increase, the number of XP points needed to cross to the next level increases. Since XPs can be gained through repetitive actions, the levels do not indicate quality achievement. The actual game points in the narrative are represented by 'castle points'. The actual progress of one's kingdom is reflected by the number of royal buildings or royal items one has. Each royal component gives castle points; the more castle points, the greater a monarch you are. The castle points are linked to these objects being placed in the playing landscape. Selling royal items or storing them in the inventory can knock off a few points from one's score.

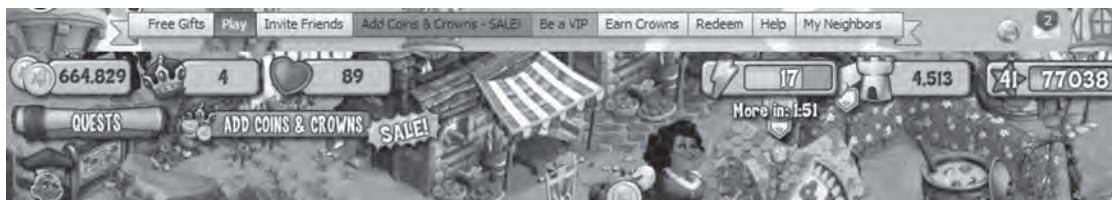
The peculiar nature of the games linked on Facebook creates game-neighbours. You can invite Facebook friends to be your co-players in the game and post game-updates on their walls. Performing a maximum of five tasks in a neighbour's kingdom allows one to earn reputation points, energy and some game resource items, some of which can be bought only with reputation points. Aptly, reputation points are represented by plump red hearts. The cap-limit on this

currency is 100 hearts. Some potions and crafted goods also yield reputation points if used.

The medium of exchange between virtual and real money is a privileged currency called a *crown*. While free users of the game are rewarded a single crown for every experience level they cross, premium users can buy crowns online by paying real money. Many times there are two level sale announcements. "Buy more virtual crown-money by paying less real money at fabulous exchange rates". Or alternatively: "Buy virtual goods at 50 percent off by paying only half price in crowns". Being rich in the real world will allow one to buy crowns and be rich in the virtual world too.

We find that these and other games of this kind are a confluence of player imagination and capabilities, and the intent and capacities of the game designer. What is interesting is the projection of these intentions in a virtual world through time, space and commercial interest. No doubt, there are people who scoff at these games as silly and beneath academic interest, but statistics show, for instance, that there were approximately 37 million players globally, playing *CastleVille* during January 2012.⁸ It is important, therefore, to start thinking about the implications of this for our world and our understanding of these imaginative virtual worlds. ■

FIG. 7: Statistics Bar



SCREENSHOTS FROM AUTHOR'S GAME PLAY ON ZYNGA INC.'S CASTLEVILLE, 10 DECEMBER 2012

Notes

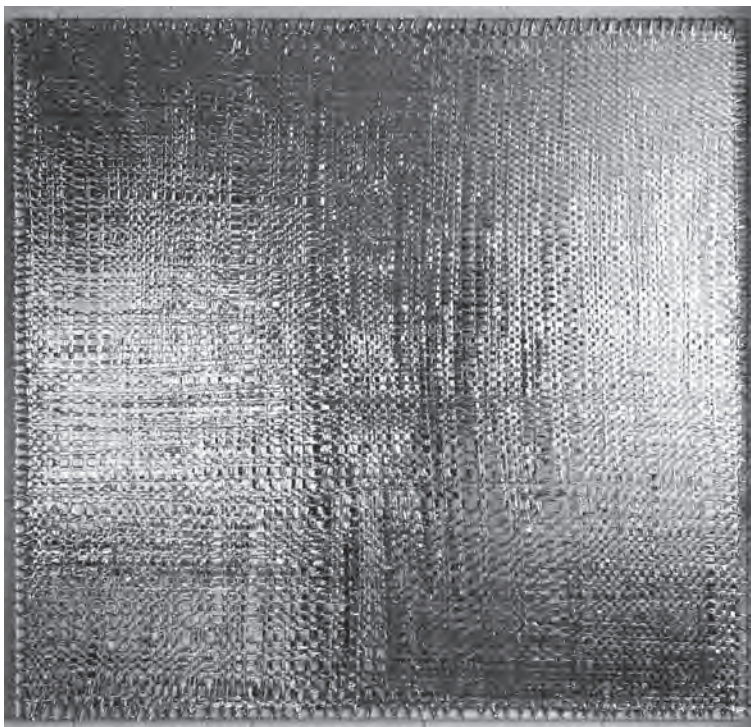
- 1 Michael Heim. **Virtual Realism** (Oxford University Press, 1998, New York), p. 6.
- 2 Ernest M. Adams. "Postmodernism and the Three Types of Immersion". In **Gamasutra**, 9 July 2004. Available at: http://www.designersnotebook.com/Columns/063_Postmodernism/063_postmodernism.html (last accessed 10 December 2012).
- 3 *CastleVille* is a popular Zynga game played through Facebook and set in a magical-cum-mediaeval time. The player rules a 'kingdom' with a few subjects, and achieves tasks to thwart the evil Gloom Lord, Faugrimm. The game is a freemium game, which means basic play is free. There are, however, many premium items and game features that can be unlocked by the privilege of virtual money, purchasable through the company. The game relies on the addictive nature of players to entice them to buy its premium features.
- 4 Jon Dovey and Helen W. Kennedy. **Game Cultures: Computer Games as New Media** (Open University Press, 2006, Maidenhead, England), p. 95.
- 5 Ken Hillies. "Toward the Light". In (eds.) Mike Crang, Phil Crang and Jon May, **Virtual Geographies: Bodies, Space and Relations** (Routledge, 1999, New York), p. 32.
- 6 Dovey and Kennedy, op. cit., p. 93.
- 7 Vivek N, my brother, is a freelance software professional who gave me a technical perspective on this in a personal mail. (Personal communication, courtesy of the author.)
- 8 Brandy Shaul. "CastleVille passes FarmVille to become second biggest game on Facebook". From Games.com news. Available at: <http://blog.games.com/2012/01/03/castleville-passes-farmville-second-facebook-game/> (last accessed 10 December 2012).



SPACE BLANKETS AND EMERGENCY WEAVES

Eline McGeorge

Initially developed for space travel, emergency blankets, also called space blankets, consist of a thin sheet of plastic, coated with a metallic reflecting agent. The blankets work by reflecting up to 97 percent of radiated body heat back to the body. Consequently, emergency blankets don't work if the body is already cold, neither do they insulate from low temperatures.



Emergency Weave, Eline McGeorge
185 x 180 cm, 2012

Emergency Weave is a series of works where emergency blankets are cut into strips, woven together and then pinned to a stretcher. The weaves are site-specific, reflecting their surroundings, the people in front of them, shapes and light. References to the contexts in which they are made and shown are put together to reflect constellations of interwoven emergencies. As the economic crisis slowed down parts of the commercial art market, *Emergency Weave* was presented in the Focus section of the Frieze Art Fair, London (2012).

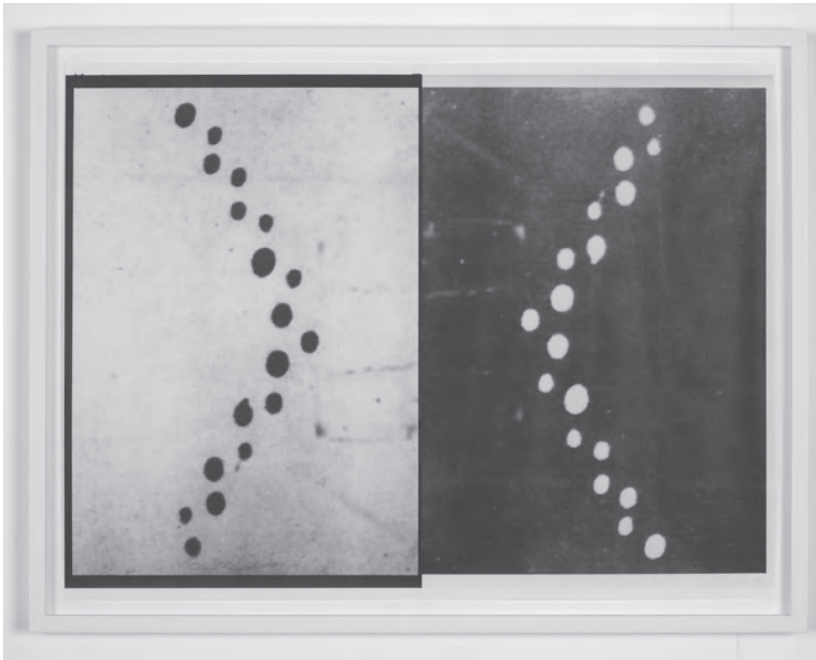
This weave is dedicated to a set of interwoven emergencies, which have created a double setback to half of the world's cultural producers. Counting the 2,500-something artists that the fair's participating galleries represent, I found that three in ten were women. This might be a telling figure of the representation of women by commercial art galleries at large. However, this inquiry does not include information on how the three in ten artists are further affected as a gender-influenced price system sets the value of their work.

Cosmonaut-Woolf portrait weave
(*A World of Our Own*),
Eline McGeorge, 2012



One of *Emergency Weave's* companions, *Cosmonaut-Woolf portrait weave (A World of Our Own)* (2012), consists of a printout of a portrait of Virginia Woolf that has been cut into strips and woven into a printed still of footage featuring Valentina Tereshkova, who in 1964 became the first woman in space. *Cosmonaut-Woolf* is a feminist pioneer, a singular space explorer who invents a future of liberation and equality. As her rocket takes off and disappears into the sky, she suggests equality as the default setting in space. Woolf's essay "A Room of One's Own" (1927) maps the historic sabotage mechanisms inflicted on women cultural producers and their work. *Cosmonaut-Woolf* takes this investigation with her as she ventures out into a space exploration, claiming a room as well as the universe as her rightful space.

In VALIE EXPORT's film *Invisible Adversaries* (1976), the space-exploring protagonist searches for aliens in human drag who have invaded earth. During her investigation of a woman, possibly an alien, the question 'When is a human being a woman?' comes up.



X – when is a woman a human being
Eline McGeorge, 2012

X – when is a woman a human being (2012) shows photographic evidence of UFOs in the Norwegian sky. The image is printed out twice, once inverted, and then put together vertically to make an X. The title appropriates EXPORT's question by turning it around. The UFOs look down at a country that is often presented as one of the most gender-equal in the world. What does a human cultural producer look like when viewed from space? When is a human cultural producer a woman? Or when is a woman a human cultural producer?

During the decade 1990-2000, 18.3 percent of the art works collected by Norway's National Museum of Contemporary Art at Oslo, and 8.6 percent of their solo shows were by women (*Billedkunst*, No. 6, 26 October 2010).

With a wider view, the UFOs can see that women have made 2-3 percent of the current content in museums across the world (Judy Chicago on *Women's Hour*, BBC Radio 4, 13 November 2012).

If the history of cultural production defines what we are as humans, as people, and gives us an account of where we come from, then what is a woman? Where does she come from, and what does she look like from space?

Cosmo-Kate Bush (2012) is a printout of a portrait of a very young Kate Bush, decorated with a cosmonaut helmet drawn in blue pen. Kate Bush had the first number one hit in the United Kingdom that was both written and performed by a woman (*Wuthering Heights*, 1978). In an interview, she explains that she had to imagine her composer self as a man to be able to write her music. Similarly, Judy Chicago tells us that she was in man-drag for the first decades of her art practice (*Talk*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2012). Her ambitions didn't match with what she was taught or not taught at art college about women and cultural production.

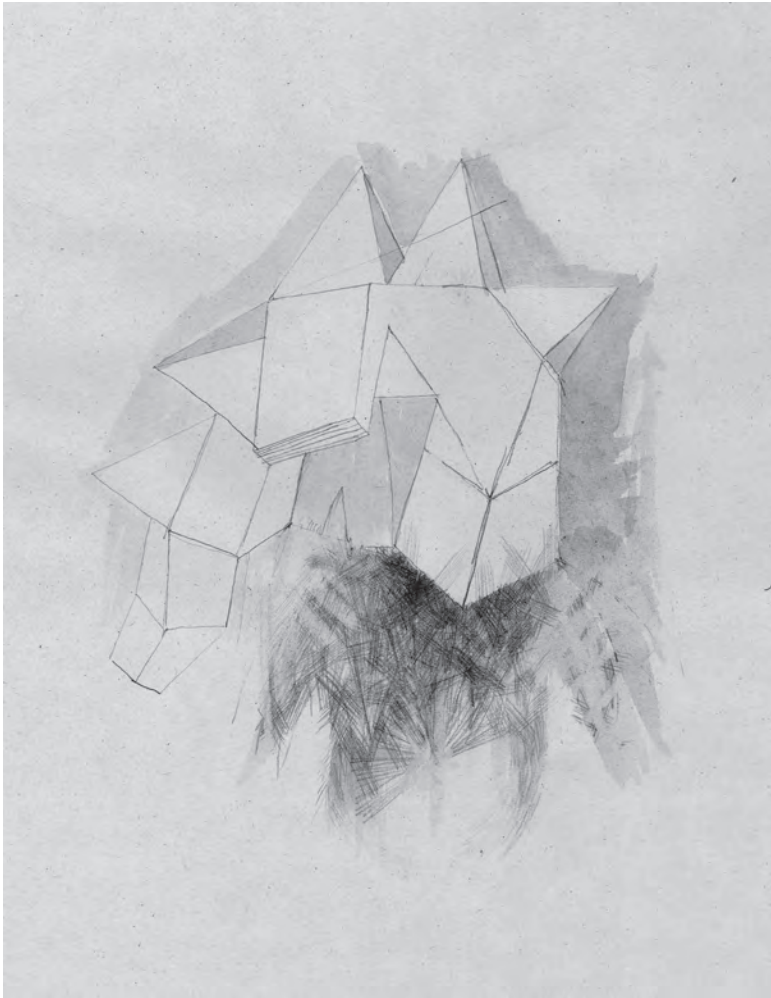
CosmoKate Bush
Eline McGeorge, 2012



Confronted with the unequal situation at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Oslo, the previous director, Allis Helleland, was asked what she thought of allocating resources to balance out the unequal representation in their collection. She replied: “But there are actually not that many to buy. There will always be a gap. Men dominated, and we can’t just invent female artists if the quality [of their art] is not good enough”. (D2, *DagensNæringsliv*, 28 August 2008)

In Woolf’s essay, “A Room of One’s Own”, Shakespeare’s equally gifted but neglected sister, Judith, is invented, but she is still real. According to Woolf’s essay, Judith ends up in an unknown grave close to Elephant and Castle, an area which today is known for its major road intersection.

Possibilities of Another Place
 Eline McGeorge, 2006

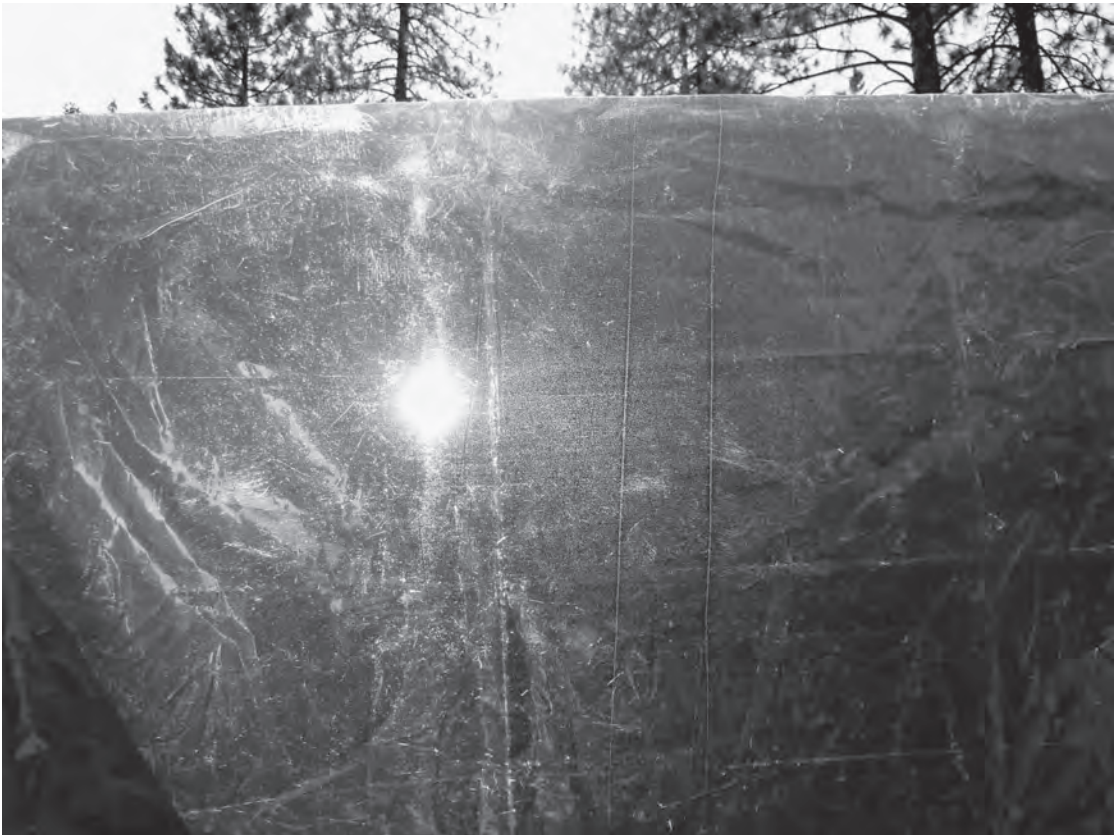


Since 1970, an equal number of women and men have graduated from Norwegian art colleges (*Billedkunst*, No. 6, 26 October 2010). The figures suggest that new generations of Judiths are continuously created, that future art histories will continue to contain gaps, and that the mechanisms described by Woolf in 1927 are still at work. For example, what does the museum director mean by 'quality'? Is 'quality' indicated by who is the most sold, collected or highest-priced contemporary artist? If so, what is quality really? As the definition of quality has changed continuously throughout art history, throughout political and social systems, then what does quality look like from a viewpoint in space? If the cultural production made by women does not match the quality standards of human cultural production, are women then humans? On the other hand, if women are human, is the museums' failure to collect, preserve and include their cultural production a breach of human rights? Can we report the museums to the European Court of Human Rights? Or how would a national and publicly funded museum withstand a people's tribunal questioning its lack of care for the cultural contribution made by half of the country's population?

To resemble the known legacy of a human cultural producer as defined by museums, to match the notion of quality that is paired with this legacy and the research that further confirms it, Chicago's 'man-drag' becomes an outfit that she could wear to be recognisable, not only to the outside world, but also to herself.

The drawing, *Possibilities of Another Place* (2006), shows a torso covered with pencil lines. Cubist-like broken shapes sit on top of the torso, unrecognisable as a human head.

With a wishful, science-fiction future view from space, one can see a movement of museum directors taking off their man-drag and becoming space-explorers. Their research catches up with reality to include the other half of the world in their presentation and preservation of human cultural production. Emergency blankets don't make an already cold body warm, so the process takes old notions of art, quality and value through yet another remake. Shakespeare's countless sisters are discovered and brought into the light and made part of a human legacy, which not only makes the sisters human, but also changes humanity, changes the aliens' observations and their understanding of what it means to be human, what human endeavour and culture is and what quality might entail. When the sisters come out of the dark, the shapes on their heads fall into place and become recognisable as they unfold into a human cultural legacy in a chain reaction of recollection. Sexism harms all species and blocks half the view from space. The Xth-wave feminism rides on the back of previous feminisms as they unleash their space-altering powers. ■



Emergency Blanket, Eline McGeorge, 2012

HEMAN CHONG: CALENDARS 2020-2096¹

David Teh



What would be the basic ingredients of science fiction, its minimum system requirements? The adventurous postulation of another world, complete and completely other? No doubt some heroic feats of imagination tower above the genre. Or is it more about allegory, the cultivation of a distant world, intractably foreign and yet unmistakably our own? A sci-fi badge of honour comes with rigorous adherence to the laws of some imaginary technology; but just as potent may be deviant reckonings with the most ordinary, existing technology. Perhaps it all turns on the 'mirror worlds' that cyberpunk guru William Gibson identified as the hinges between one reality and another. For while the fuel of science fiction may be imagination, its engine is the very material world of the reader. For the other world to take – as one would say of a memory, grafted onto some protagonist's brain – it cannot stray too far from this one. Hence, the enduring parallelism of the genre (time-travel, multiple identities, specular metaphors,

rabbit holes...) in which is announced the need for displacement, *the very necessity of fiction*: to life's quotidian fabric, its Moebius Band; to repetition, its bare modicum of difference; to memory, its margin of error.

Indeed, science fiction turns out to be at its most compelling not at the point of maximal fantasy, but at the point of minimal displacement from the here and now. Trite though it may sound, in order to have any impact on us – beyond mere amusement or distraction – an alternative reality, whether removed from us in time or in space or both, must be somehow immanent to our present one. For the real is always more dangerous and more compelling than analogy. Even more radical, it seems, than this other world which might be our own, is *this world here*, which might yet be other than it is. (This is what Foucault is getting at when he notes how cosily Utopia nestles itself in language, so tame by comparison with the “heteroclitite” spaces of Borges’ Chinese encyclopaedia.²) And even more impressive than skilled concealment is its skilled revelation: as we are reminded by Michael Taussig, to cite an art world favourite, scepticism is not opposed to belief, but in fact excites it, compounds it, consummates it.³ Animist and shamanic traditions have probably always known this. At any rate, they’re not the ones investing in special effects. For the trump cards



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of make-believe might be held rather closer to the bosom of realism than we had thought. Hence, it is often a naked actuality – from Jean Rouch's *Maitres Fous* or Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, to the primitive sci-fi of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee*, Philippe Parreno's *Boy from Mars*, or Neil Beloufa's *Kempinski* – that precipitates the 'magic' of the moving image.

II

I tend to be suspicious of contemporary art's modish investments in cult literatures. There was a time, not so

long ago, when you almost couldn't enter a gallery without seeing a copy of W.G. Sebald's *Rings of Saturn* chained to some table, if not to the actual artwork.⁴ But in the long run, good artists make lousy boffins – it would be unseemly, after all, to show too studied an interest in a *métier* other than one's own. (Those that do risk ending up in the Museum of Everything.)

In the wake of conceptualism, text has been well and truly naturalised in the pedagogy of modern art; the artist's book holds a comfortable niche in its exhibitions and merchandising; and yet literary creation still sits uneasily amongst its aesthetic criteria. It may

be some time before criticism can take stock of the fact that writing – in 'post-studio practice', though perhaps not for the first time – has become another kind of drawing. Writing in general, and sci-fi in particular, is central to the work of Heman Chong. He is not shy of turning his hand to the craft itself (PHILIP, 2006), but his interest is clearly more formal than generic. Reading and writing are points of departure, a practice, almost a discipline: clearly quotidian, yet too studied to be mere obsession. Narrative will have its place but not before the book form itself has been assayed. First as a physical vehicle, a plastic medium, with all the framing that comes with it: titles, series, editions, cover designs; publishers, bookshops, advertisements. Second as a set of *practices*, the process and performance of writing, of reading, of composition and redaction, of dissemination and translation. Only then might we indulge in some reflection on how this ordinary, concrete form – these piles of fixed, repetitive marks, line after line, page upon page – can open worlds so multiform and unregulated, so moving and immersive, in the minds of readers.

Thoroughgoing it may be, but the artist's penchant for literature is not academic. The books in his work do not rehearse some meta-commentary on the state of the world, but make sense only as part of a personal and



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contingent series. Anchored to the individual, they function primarily as *accessories to life*, not so much a canon as a collection. At once avid and irreverent, Chong celebrates literature, but also desacralises and domesticates it. A book is apt to be put on a pedestal one minute (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 2008), and to *become* the pedestal the next (as in his “stacks”, 2003-11). There is some resemblance here to the listing culture made natural by social media platforms – one’s ‘profile’ as a live network of associations, the customised digital self – and with it, a temptation to make sense of the series, to decode each stack as a kind of portrait. Each might correspond to a particular apartment, a lonely residency, perhaps a relationship. Like piles of old diaries, each near-Readymade a slice of a domestic geology, a window onto some other season. Chong is clearly partial to time travel. But the future envisaged by his *Calendars* is only a feint, for the real science fiction here is in the pictures.

III

The artist frames a shot; the shot frames an architecture; the architecture frames a society. The first thing to be reiterated here is that it’s never a question of ‘inside or outside’, but always both. Chong’s discernment should be underscored: spaces that



DECEMBER 十二月

2027 二〇二七

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FEBRUARY 二月

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MARCH 三月

2052 二〇五二

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JUNE 六月

2070 二〇七〇

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are accessible to the public, though not, properly speaking, 'public space'. Teflon-coated space, hard-edged and frictionless. Tiling is the emblem of this indifferent accommodation. The artist irritates a specifically Singaporean denial of the public sphere, whilst also prodding at the privatising modernity of which Singapore considers itself the rightful heir and nunciate in the region (a modernity observed very differently in Indonesia or Malaysia). These are the loose and indefinite thresholds of the social: neither public nor private; empty, yet inhabited; unsealed, yet secure.

There has certainly been no shortage of imagery devoted to this architecture, much of it belonging to the documentary genre that is so pronounced in Singaporean contemporary art. Photography and video are its favoured channels, and most of it is relentlessly anthropocentric – a kind of social realism, even when the people are absent. Nostalgia often comes disguised in a crisp, objectivist aesthetic. Chong's choice is clear: figures would immediately conjure a false ethnography; space would become narrative, opening the door to a romantic journalism. Yet even the empty scene runs the risk of such a projection, with its decorative touches and humanising details. If Chong manages to avoid a romantic reclamation, he does so by way of a

putatively infinite reiteration. The result is not documentary but documentation in a purer sense. Programmatic or even machinic, it reaches for a kind of transparency, something like the “meticulous inexpression” Baudrillard identified with Warhol’s “snobbish machine”.⁵

Let’s not fool ourselves: celebration of the void deck is nationalist self-congratulation, and fundamentally recuperative, already the stuff of BBC World city snapshots.⁶ If you don’t show the block cleansed, voided, ghosted, ‘en bloc’; if you don’t get inside the boxes to the million petty resentments, closeted perversions and desperate, air-conditioned climaxes; if you don’t unleash the suppressed but irrepressible spectres of these places, vent the epic indigestion of a totalitarian consumption of space, you’re just another apologist for state developmentalism. It’s the shadows of the Housing and Development Board (HDB) block that count – its Unconscious. (Hence, the significance of Tan Pin Pin’s psycho-geographies, or the vertical pan of Ho Tzu Nyen’s *The Cloud of Unknowing*.)

It has been fairly remarked that the HDB is Singapore’s single most important institution, the cortex of the national imaginary – a dynamic series of formal templates, combing the landscape like a great, egalitarian Panopticon; but also the linchpin of a



APRIL四月

2055 二〇五五

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whole national philosophy. The HDB sits at the ideological coal-face of the investment state, a finely calibrated instrument of social and economic sculpture, the mother of all cookie-cutters – poised at the crossroads of demography, taxation, capital development, discipline, family planning, education and leisure – both earth-mover and nano-forceps with which the softening authoritarian state designs and reproduces its still-brittle society.

Singapore’s crowning national achievement, and the governing irony of its modernity, lies in this engine of a truly massive *domestication*

defining both private and public life as, precisely, unopposed. As the template of the republic’s staggering rectilinear volume, it carves out the impression of permanence against all odds, defying the equatorial entropy all around it. The irony, though, is that this impression of permanence rests upon built-in obsolescence and on an economic hypertrophy that radically curtails the half-life of all this super-dense structure. Perhaps nowhere else on earth could ‘bricks and mortar’ have such a figurative, temporary ring to it.

Indeed, Chong’s photographs might just as well be captioned with the phrase with which Eugène Atget

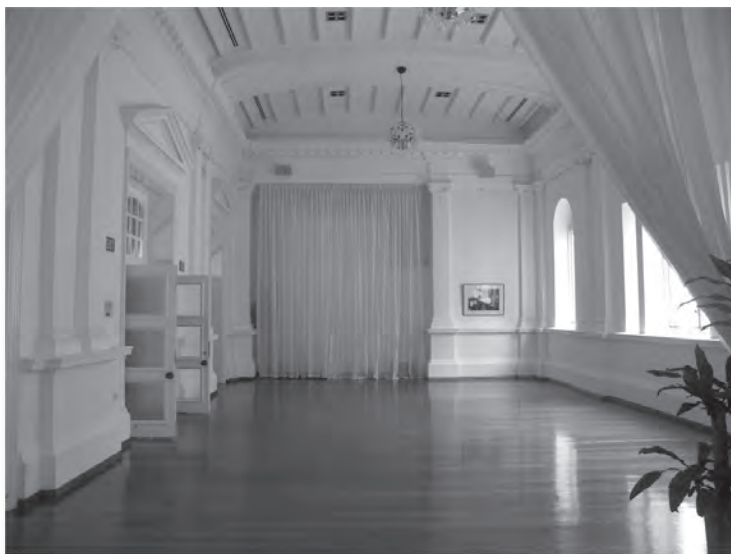
tagged his ponderous documentation of the *quartiers anciens* of Paris: *will disappear*. There is something morbid about this photographic tiling, archival in the sense of an obituary, like scanning the stacks of some great columbarium. Lewis Mumford once observed that the dead were the first in human history to get a proper roof over their heads. In Singapore, they get much more than a roof. The lifestyle of the future, after all, is much more valuable than the life of the past – our golf courses will outlive the last graveyard. For it is no longer the horizontal surface of the earth that fundamentally organises life, but the soaring grid of a death gone vertical.

IV

Since Rosalind Krauss penned her seminal assassination of modernism in the early 1980s, its archetypal visual form, the grid, has had rather a bad name. It is worth recalling the terms of her prosecution. Modernism's *tabula rasa*, the grid, is "what art looks like when it turns its back on nature", purporting to banish all voice, all narrative, all discourse from its midst. But this "naked and determined materialism", by which the physical and aesthetic dimensions of the image are shown to be one and the same, sits uneasily with most of what modern art

has professed to locate there: Being, Mind, Spirit.⁷

The contradiction, says Krauss, is rooted in a much earlier encounter with *techne*, in the perspective lattice of the Renaissance, which cemented the bond between reality and its representation. It is ironic, then, that the grid would later come to be so emblematic of art's decoupling from that real, of its preference for its own plane of reference, "autonomous and autotelic". Apparently so absent from the art of the 19th century, the grid's authority over that of the 20th seems all the more remarkable. But Krauss, for one, isn't buying it. She looks to the grids that lay buried in the Unconscious of early-modern representation, erupting from time to time in sublimated, pictorial form, such as the Symbolists' figure of the window. If the perspectival grid was always there, lurking beneath every painterly narrative since the Renaissance, so must some narrative be lurking beneath the painterly grid of the modern. Krauss has recourse here to the structuralist account of myth, as that which allows the suspension of contradictions between lived experience and spiritual truth. The grid may once have appeared to be totally secular in form, yet it had proved itself – and long before Krauss came along – to be rooted firmly in the realm of *belief*. Thus is revealed a "modernist myth": the grid is ideology, an article of faith.



JANUARY 一月

2070 二〇七〇

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It's hard to ignore a correspondence here with the matrix of a certain built environment, with that no less expansive repetition of form that undergirds the developmental Unconscious. Why is the grid totalitarian? Because in pretending to be prior to nature, it presents itself as all-encompassing, infinitely extensible in every direction, impervious to all other spatial systems. Its truth is contingent upon nothing other than its own manifest universality. If the empty, abstract grid is disquieting as a model for aesthetic autonomy, as a template for lived space it is still more terrifying. Space without memory, without a past, without a story to tell. Is this danger anywhere more palpable than here in Singapore?

But if a programmatic repetition once again appears to suppress narrative, its extension might nevertheless lay bare a certain narrative Unconscious – precisely, the national myth of gridding, the grand narrative of Singapore's prodigious modernity. No raw nature will be spared this epic rationalisation – far from it, for nature itself can be *produced*; reclamation and desalination are its proof-of-concept. Moreover, for the grid to function as ideology, it must present its own articles of faith, organic logos of a transcendence in which the contradiction between a nation's exponential aspirations and the reality



DECEMBER十二月

2084 二〇八四

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DECEMBER十二月

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2034 二〇三四

of its rectilinear everyday may appear to be resolved. No wonder the erection of curvaceous landmarks is such an obsession of power.

V

The calendar too – even a calendar from the future – is a quintessentially rationalising form. Gridded time, metric and modern; steady, linear and irreversible. And the frame, that which would mark the noteworthy, here enshrines the nondescript. Framing these photos with abstract time cannot but exacerbate the static quality of the

scenes, taken over many years under the cover of a kind of bored stealth.

Asian conceptualism has confronted this abstract time with a sometimes monastic forbearance – think of On Kawara's Date Paintings, Teh-Ching Hsieh clocking on and off, or Montien Boonma padding round a *stupa*. What would be an organically *Southeast Asian* way of packaging time? Indonesia's celebrated 'rubber time': the length of a taxi-ride from Cengkareng to Jalan Jaksa, perhaps, a sufficiently elastic measure. Or *kopitiam* time: empty bottles like 'dead soldiers lined up on the table'. Chong

Calendars 2020-2096, Heman Chong, 2011
IMAGES COURTESY HEMAN CHONG

cites a Malaysian studio time: the time it takes for a mosquito coil to leave its dusty footprint on a plate.⁸ So many indices of an ambient regional temporality, everywhere beset by the corrosive rationality of the modern. In Singapore, though, we tend to see the flipside: the firm grids of progress – curved though they may these days be – ever beset by the corrosive entropy of the tropics.

Beaver away in the air-conditioned society, one almost forgets that the life of the nation, and perhaps its eventual death, are matters of a great, collective struggle against the second law of thermodynamics. I recently caught the train up to Kuala Lumpur from the old station at Tanjong Pagar, that living icon of a more permeable past, just before they closed it. As thresholds go, there could be few as telling of Singapore's peculiar and tenuous grip on its little place in the world – ironically enough, 'a little piece of Malaysia'. It was no metaphor. As soon as I even think about taking the train, all the certainties of Singaporean administration wobble and dissolve before my eyes. The Malaysian Railways' computers are down for several days. Even in person, I can't book. On the day, the staff at the window, smiling and apologetic, write me a ticket by hand. Approaching the platform, all the seams of rectilinear space sigh around me. In creep rust, dust and mould,

weeds and insects – all the stuff that's been outlawed in Singapore. Systems soften. The customs guy tries to rip me off with some bogus luggage charge. I refuse. He relents. (It's not like this could only happen in Malaysia, but it sure ain't Singapore!) And by some perverse quirk of post-colonial history, the checkpoints have been inverted, such that one arrives in Malaysia before having left downtown Singapore. Talk about parallel worlds.

The weekend after the old station closed, a gaggle of Sunday photographers was already traipsing up and down the tracks, lenses poised to re-render this heirloom of the colonial modern, to reify it as a vestige of an already simulacral yesteryear. What happens when the map engulfs the territory, when the past is pure simulation? We will awake one day to find that this grid is our only nature, and the star-architectural statements on every corner will have done nothing to loosen the brackets of experience. (This is the sad humour beneath Michael Lee's retro-futurist modelling – what more apt metaphor could there be for a pre-gridded nature than the architect's *maquette*?) When no salvage is possible, not even real nostalgia, the only past left to us may be one taking refuge in the future, our only access to it by return to a magical reality, or a minimal science fiction. ■

Notes

- 1 This text was written as a catalogue essay to accompany the exhibition, **HEMAN CHONG: Calendars 2020–2096**, held at NUS Museum, Singapore, from December 2011 to February 2012. It is reproduced here with a selection of images from the exhibition, kindly provided by the artist.
- 2 Michel Foucault. **The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences**, (trans.) Alan Sheridan (Vintage, 1994, New York), pp. xv-xvii.
- 3 Michael Taussig. "Viscerality, Faith and Skepticism: Another Theory of Magic". In **Walter Benjamin's Grave** (University of Chicago Press, 2006, Chicago, London), p. 123.
- 4 Meanwhile, the vogue for unabashed Utopia has ushered all manner of 'parallel worlds' into the spaces of contemporary art, catering with surprising transparency to the curatorial God-complex. Rirkrit Tiravanija's **Ne travaillez jamais** at least nominates a specific historical referent, more than we can say for Nicholas Bourriaud's earnest theory of the 'altermodern'. Daniel Birnbaum's polyglot branding device in Venice, **Fare Mundi**, has precipitated a worldwide spate of talk-fests on 'world-making'.
- 5 An image that may be "multiplied infinitely, but not explored in depth". Jean Baudrillard. "Andy Warhol: Snobbish Machine", (trans.) Julian Pefanis. In (ed.) Terry Smith, **Impossible Presence: Surface and Screen in the Photogenic**

Era (Power Publications, 2001, Sydney), pp. 183-192.

- 6 Four in every five Singaporeans live in apartments built and administered by the Housing and Development Board (HDB), a body set up in 1960 by the newly-elected People's Action Party. The 'void deck' is a level of an HDB block left vacant for communal use. 'En bloc' is the expression used to describe the status of an estate slated for demolition and redevelopment.
- 7 Rosalind Krauss. "Grids". In **The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths** (The MIT Press, 1988, London and Cambridge, Mass.), pp. 9-10.
- 8 **Burnt-out mosquito coils used to keep away mosquitoes on the night of 25 March 1974** was exhibited as part of the ground-breaking collaborative show of Redza Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa, 'Towards a Mystical Reality' at Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1974.

AGHA SHAHID ALI AS KRISHNA

THE LIMITS OF THE SECULAR IN KASHMIR

Akhil Katyal

I can't fully recognize the deity, though – they have so many. In all probability it must be Bhagwan Krishna; it's a good-looking god, pleasant, benign, not intimidating. In spite of being blue.

Mirza Waheed, "The Collaborator" (2011:286)

In the June of 2012, on my trip to Srinagar to meet people who had known the poet Agha Shahid Ali (1949-2001), I met the writer and researcher Abir Bashir Bazaz at what he said was "Shahid's favourite café", Hideout, nestled next to the *bund* that runs along the river Jhelum. It was in a conversation with him that a particular image frequent in Shahid's oeuvre was fore-grounded – the image of Shahid as a young boy dressed as Krishna – which turned out to be a visual clue to unpack the problem of secularism in Kashmir. More precisely, to unpack one colourless understanding of secularism as the problem in Kashmir – the one which does not take account of the fact that religion can form the horizon of political thought; which seeks to always see them apart, and refuses to acknowledge that, historically, a political demand can become imminent within a religious utterance.

Shahid, Abir told me, "was very fond of his image as Krishna" (Bazaz 2012). It was one of his favourite self projections, recurring in accounts of him that I heard later from several of his friends, from his elder brother and his father. It was an image that crystallised like no other his idea of togetherness between faiths – a young Shia boy dressed as a Hindu god. It was a simple ecumenical image, an exercise in effortless hyphenation. The image appeared again in his last years in Brooklyn, when he told his younger friend Amitav Ghosh that "[w]henver people talk to me about Muslim fanaticism, I tell them how my mother helped me make a temple in my room. What do you make of that? I ask them" (Ghosh 2002). Shahid's answer to the *general* question of 'Muslim fanaticism' is in the painfully *particular*, in the indulgence of his own mother, Sufia, for his childhood desire to pray to gods outside Islam.

Months after my conversation with Abir, in the winter of Srinagar, Iqbal, Shahid's elder brother, confirmed Ghosh's account, sitting in the verandah of their house in the affluent neighbourhood of Rajbagh. He pointed towards Shahid's room and told me, "*Bhaiyya* had a small *mandir* with *prasad*, *puja* and everything; then, another time, he had a small chapel full of hymns and prayers. His affair with Guru Nanak, I think", Iqbal said, smiling, "lasted a shorter while" (Iqbal Ali 2012). "Ma used to," he said, "dress up *bhaiyya* as Krishna" (*ibid.*). Ghosh also recalls this as Shahid's "favourite story", saying that as a child "[h]e was initially hesitant to tell his parents but when he did they responded with an enthusiasm equal to his own. His mother

bought him *murtis* and other accoutrements and for a while he was assiduous in conducting *pujas* at this shrine". Shahid repaid this childhood debt years later when his mother lay dying in a hospital in Manhattan in 1997, by recalling this scene in what was to be one of his most moving and cited poems, *Lenox Hill*: "...to save you as you were, young, in song in Kashmir, / and I, one festival, crowned Krishna by you, Kashmir / listening to my flute. You never let gods die" (Ali 2010:247). To the collective, political problem of alleged 'Muslim fanaticism', Shahid's answer lies in the exceptional, in the intimate, in a delicate childhood memory where one religion seamlessly dissolves into another.

During the 1990s, Abir told me, he felt Shahid was intellectually rigorous on several matters – they used to talk over hours about poetry and Kashmir – except when it came to "the Hindu-Muslim question because he immediately became sentimental about it... he did not push the envelope, I think... did not realize more substantially the question of difference", the variant trajectories that Islam and Hinduism have historically followed in Kashmir (Bazaz). "Given what had happened here," Abir suspected, "he would have certainly gone deeper" had he lived longer and continued to write on Kashmir (*ibid.*). My conversations with Abir were happening at a stage when I myself was coming to terms with what this "question of difference" could be. Shahid's simple syncretistic vision projected in the image of him as Krishna was seductive and no doubt moving, rhetorically. Its undemanding message spoke resonantly to the slogan that I had frequently heard growing up in North India in the 1990s, by which the better portion of the subcontinent sought to constantly exorcise its communal ghosts – *Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Isai, apas mein hain bhai bhai* (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, all are brothers). I had thought that the basic idea – of a sibling-like congruency among faiths – behind this slogan could be easily transplanted to Kashmir.

Both Abir and Ghosh, however, suggested that there was something of a missed opportunity in this image, an avoidance, perhaps, of a fuller encounter with the experience of the majority of Kashmiri Muslims. They suggested that the visual overlap of the Muslim boy with the Hindu god projected by Shahid might not be complete, that it made for excellent poetry, perhaps, but as a political insight it was possibly feeble. The image suggests an *equidistance*, an idea that both faiths have to chart the same distance, as it were, to reach this ideal togetherness. The full complementarity of Hinduism and Islam that is the point of the image, its wishful locus, misunderstands how these two faiths have been experienced by Kashmiris, how they do not simply balance out on the weighing scale of power. "The truth is", Ghosh wrote, "that Shahid's gaze was not political in the sense of being framed in terms of policy and solutions. In the broadest sense, his vision tended always towards the inclusive and ecumenical, an outlook that he credited to his upbringing". I argue in this essay that the simultaneous seductiveness and inadequacy of Shahid's image, of inclusiveness so defined, parallels the seduction and insufficiency of the way secularism is usually deployed in Kashmir.

Since the 1980s, the problem in Kashmir has been projected as that of a failed secularism. The *short history* often given of the years since 1989 hollows out the connection between religion and politics in Kashmir under the umbrella phrase of *Islamicisation*, which assumes that religion has no place in politics, that it can only be an impurity from outside and that it will necessarily only take up a fanatical shape. Working with a limited definition of secularism, Indian writers, politicians and army chiefs have failed to take into account the fact that the religious sensibility that informs the political mobilisation in Kashmir is rooted in, among other things, the *long history* of how the majority of Kashmiri Muslims have fared during successive governments, first the Hindu Dogra kingdom (1846-1947) and then Indian rule. This projection of the Kashmiri movement for freedom as failed secularism is both an intellectual cop-out and a kind of political stratagem against *all* separatist thought that necessarily builds on the religious experience of Kashmiri Muslims.

**"...to save you as
you were, young, in
song in Kashmir, /
and I, one festival,
crowned Krishna
by you, Kashmir /
listening to my flute.
You never let
gods die"**

For instance, writing soon after the Agra Summit between the then Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf in 2001, Indian columnist Tavleen Singh wrote that “[g]roups like the JKLF and Kashmiri leaders like Shabir Shah have tried to maintain the secular character of their struggle for freedom *but have failed*” (Singh 2001; emphasis mine). “They have spoken”, she writes, “often about the tragedy of Kashmiri Hindus being forced out of the state”, but then with little evidence adds, “but their appeals lack popular support”. In a similar vein, Gen (rtd) Srinivas Kumar Sinha, former Governor of Jammu and Kashmir (who was instrumental in establishing the Sri Amarnath Trust Board in 2003) made a broad statement in an interview in 2008 that “[t]here is an environment of religious intolerance in Kashmir. There was ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits from the state but no one talks about them. Kashmir has been Talibanised by the Separatists. *The Secular lobby never condemns the communal politics of Syed Ali Shah Geelani*” (quoted in Fotedar 2008; emphasis mine). Published in the same year, Sumit Ganguly’s book-length study, *The Crisis in Kashmir*, in trying to understand why Kashmiri “mobilization [took] place along ethnoreligious lines”, also explains its cause in the failure of secular politics in the region (quoted in Rai 2004). This simple projection of Kashmir as a case of communal politics vs. secular politics – always focusing overwhelmingly on the recent uprising since 1989 as if the history of Kashmir before that is a blank slate – is a red herring of enormous proportions. It has kept us all this while from understanding that if we are to speak at all of a *botched secularism* in Kashmir, then dating it to the 1980s does not cut it. We have to project it back painstakingly by at least a century and a half, and see it instead as a political deployment, as an official policy that was by and large institutionalised by governments in Kashmir, whether of the Hindu Dogra kings, or later, with compromised changes, Indian.

If we were to project – in the root sense of the word, the Latin *proicere* means to throw forth – our historical narrative backwards, much before 1989, we will see an almost continuous and harsh inequity under which a majority of Kashmiri Muslims have laboured, which in turn created conditions of their consolidation as a political force as *Muslims* (see Rai 2004; Mishra 2000). Even a cursory glance at these decades would explain how religion, being a reason for systematic political and material disfavour, becomes, as a consequence, a medium of political outrage. Almost ever since the British East India Company formed the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir by the Treaty of Amritsar in March 1846, and sought to legitimise it as a Hindu buffer state between its Indian territories and the more unstable influences of Afghanistan and Russia, Kashmiri Muslims, apart from a small elite, found themselves under a rule whereby they had a fiercely unequal access to political power, bureaucratic positions, revenue machinery, land holdings, education, religious rights and the opportunities to live with comfort and dignity and without violence.

For a particularly violent instance: it was charged, during the Kashmiri famine of 1877-79, that the Dogra maharaja Ranbir Singh (1830-85) “in order to save the expense of feeding his people”, had preferred to drown boat-loads of Muslims in the Wular Lake (see Rai 2004:142). Such an event was only emblematic of a far more pervasive exclusion of Kashmiri Muslims from, as Mridu Rai argues in her redoubtable book *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, the symbolic, economic and political resources of the Hindu Dogra state. For instance, by its agricultural arrangements, the Dogras prevailed over a system where the entire tax-collecting machinery was headed by the Kashmiri Pandits, who despite being only about five percent of the Kashmiri population, owing to their high level of literacy, prosperity and political influence also hugely dominated the spheres of bureaucracy and education. A decade after the said famine, in a note on the “Position of the Cultivating Classes in Kashmir” submitted to the colonial Foreign Department in 1890, the British civil servant Walter R. Lawrence noted that the “administration of Kashmir [is] opposed to the interests of the cultivating classes [which

were mostly Muslim] and to the development of the country”, asserting that “the officials systematically endeavoured to make themselves feared by the people” (Rai:148). He added that while many of the Pandit officials might be “individually gentle and intelligent, as a body they were cruel and oppressive... and their combination [w]as of so perfect... a nature as to make impossible to break” their stranglehold over institutional power.

In matters of official religious and cultural patronage too, the scale was tilted in favour of the Kashmiri Pandits and the Jammu Hindus. Largely by-passing the colonial government’s anxious command to be more ‘representative’ of their kingdom, the Dogras overwhelmingly favoured Hindu religious customs and sites of worship over Muslim ones by making large donations, by incorporating patently Hindu icons in the political rituals of the court and, among other discriminatory acts, virulently punishing cow-slaughter. In his 1884 *Ain-i-Dharmarth*, Maharaja Ranbir Singh outlined the purpose of his Dharmarth Trust with “a view solely to ensure the advancement of the sacred religion of the Hindus” (see *ibid.*:115-16). A review of the almost hundred years of Dogra rule should leave no doubt that it was a blatantly Hindu state, and that it methodically thwarted the concerns of its Muslim majority which in turn led to the banding together of the Muslim citizens identified and excluded *as such*. The very basis for their exclusion – their religious identity – became necessarily the vehicle of their struggle.

Under pressure from the British government in 1931 to hear and look into these long-held, distinctly *Muslim* grievances, which had erupted on 13 July that year when, for the first time, Kashmiri Muslims had openly demonstrated against Dogra authority, Maharaja Hari Singh set up the Glancy Commission, which went on to recommend that the king should allow the formation of political parties and the hitherto banned publication of newspapers in the state. It was during these years that Sheikh Abdullah (1905-82), whose son and grandson were also to become chief-ministers of J&K, “appeared to be everywhere and *speaking for every class of Kashmiri Muslims*” (*ibid.*:270; emphasis mine). Capitalising on the recommendations of the commission, Sheikh Abdullah founded the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference in October 1932, whose name was changed to National Conference only in 1939.

Abdullah projected his voice as the voice of the majority of Kashmiri Muslims, particularly the cultivators and craftsmen, and until about the mid-1930s spoke openly and virulently against the dominance of the Kashmiri Pandits. He was to later tone down this rhetoric by using a more ‘secular’ language of rights that seemed to be borrowed from the Indian National Congress but was crucially different from it in the sense that it did not dilute the religious identity within a political demand, letting politics emerge from the bedrock of religious affinities (see *ibid.*:274-87). Even as his party sought to build bridges within a more nationalist framework through the idea of shared *Kashmiriyat* (‘Kashmiriness’) between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, these different communities very precisely remained religiously defined in his party’s rhetoric. If we are to call it ‘secularism’, it was not of the kind that denied religion, but instead made religious affiliation and specific demands of thwarted religious communities its *modus operandi* (see *ibid.*). In a speech in Jammu in 1937, Abdullah had demanded the “grant of *perfect religious liberty*”, asserting that Hindus would no longer be allowed to think of them as “mere sheep and goats and not as Muslims” (quoted in *ibid.*:278). It is easy to notice that the 1930s only crystallised the long simmering process of the consolidation of Kashmiri Muslims as *Muslims* in order to make their material and political demands. The religious sphere and the political sphere were from then onwards to remain indistinguishable in the history of Kashmir. The inclusive idea of *Kashmiriyat* was not a denial of religious belonging, which remained, instead, accounted for within it (see *ibid.*:224-6).

In 1983, when Tavleen Singh went to cover the elections for the J&K state legislature, she observed that the “main characteristic” of then Prime Minister “Indira Gandhi’s campaign... had been to play what we liked in those days”, she says, “to call the Hindu

Sheikh Abdullah was to later use a more ‘secular’ language of rights that seemed to be borrowed from the Indian National Congress but was crucially different in that it did not dilute the religious identity within a political demand, letting politics emerge from the bedrock of religious affinities.

card... [Indira Gandhi]", she adds, "manipulated the sentiments of Jammu's large Hindu population by making campaign speeches that hinted darkly at the dangers of Muslims 'from across the border' being allowed in by the hoard if Farooq Abdullah [newly appointed National Conference chief after his father's death in 1982] came to power" (Singh *op. cit.*). A friend of Singh's who accompanied her on her trip explained the absence of commentary on Gandhi's "patently communal" campaign from national front-pages in India because, he ventured, the Indian journalists only liked "to highlight the communalism of the other side", presumably as an aberration of constitutional 'secularism' (*ibid.*). This recounting suggests that the Indian dispensation continued to use a religiously informed language in the way it made political calculations in Kashmir well after 1947. Oddly enough, though, the representatives of the Indian government and media were still left surprised when it was a religiously based idiom, which as we have seen had a *long history* in the politics of the region, that also informed the militant struggle for *azadi* (freedom) in Kashmir, in varying lengths among different groups.

Oblivious of how religion could be channelling a political struggle, the former Governor of J&K, Jagmohan, who presided over Kashmir during the early years of the uprising and spearheaded the brutal crackdown against it, in an interview to Kalyani Shankar recounted those years as being dominated only by what he disapprovingly phrased as "Islamic frenzy" being carried out by violent "anti-national elements" threatening "Indian secularism" (quoted in Shankar 2012). In a completely different vein, in January 2010, Yasin Malik of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) asked Kashmiri Pandits to return to the Valley, supplementing his invitation with a scene that highlights separate religious belonging among Kashmiris even as it brings them together, creating a vision of togetherness realised in the acceptance, not in the dissolution, of alterity. With the same pitch as the earlier Abdullah, he addressed the crowd at Gawkadal in Srinagar, saying that "[t]he minorities have stayed back [those that did] in the Valley because of the support and cooperation of their Muslim neighbours... not... because of government backing" (report at *One India News*, 2010). Here, the Muslimness and the Panditness of the neighbours in Srinagar is emphasised, not dissolved, even as their peaceful coexistence is outlined within Kashmir, which, Malik notes elsewhere, is known for "our centuries-old religious tolerance and harmony" (quoted in *Greater Kashmir* 2012). Malik's political vocabulary is attuned to religious specificity even as it aims for inclusiveness.

I argue that there is an undeniable historical continuity of religion as the medium of political expression in the Valley, that the novelty of 1989 is usually overstated and that analysis such as Singh's, which argues that Indira Gandhi's bringing down Farooq Abdullah's government in 1984 was the cause and "the beginning of the *current* Kashmir problem", is flawed at best. "The historic problem [of Kashmir's integration within India, I presume]", she writes vaguely, "died in the seventies when the Bangladesh war and the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto made the average Kashmiri suddenly see Pakistan through new eyes" (Singh *ibid.*). I seek to argue that the *current* problem in Kashmir is indebted to and is embedded in its *historic* problem, if we are to momentarily use this disingenuous categorisation. We cannot isolate the years post-1989 and then simply explain them away solely as a Pakistan-sponsored aberration of the constitutional dream of Indian 'secularism', painting in one broad brush-stroke factions as varied as Yasin Malik's JKLF, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq's Awami Action Committee and Syed Ali Shah Geelani's Jamaat-e-Islami.

In addition to the persistence of religious vocabulary for politics, the disfavour towards Kashmiri Muslims also has a history of continuity from the Dogra princely state to Indian 'democratic' rule. Historians like Mridu Rai and Pankaj Mishra have argued that the full effect of the reforms initiated by the Sheikh Abdullah government in relation to landlordism, agriculture and education in the 1950s was only partially realised (see Rai 2004:274-87; Mishra 2000). For example, the Big Estates Abolition Act, the most publicised land reform

The Indian dispensation continued to use a religiously informed language in its political calculations in Kashmir well after 1947. Oddly, the Indian government and media were still left surprised when it was a religiously based idiom that also informed the militant struggle for azadi.

of 1950, which ensured a maximum limit of 22¾ acres per landowner, was compromised by the common strategy of the landlords breaking up their joint families, thus ensuring that each adult male had individual holdings, meaning, in effect, that the family collectively retained the land. Also, since orchards were exempt from the Act, the bigger landlords of Kashmir, “whose ranks included Pandits”, escaped the ceiling in another way by converting cereal acreage into more profitable horticulture (see Rai *ibid.*:282-4). In the government service, the National Conference gave the Pandits a sizeable stake in the new arrangement by reserving 10 percent of the state jobs for them, which, considering their numbers, was disproportionate and “an impressively generous allowance” (*ibid.*:284). In Kashmir University in Srinagar, most of the senior teaching staff were Pandits till the exodus of most of the community during the uprising (see Mishra *ibid.*). “The free primary education”, over the decades, Mishra argues, “had created a new class of ambitious Kashmiri Muslims. But no new institutions had been provided to accommodate these Muslims; and the older ones were monopolized by the minority of Hindus who ran the schools and colleges” (*ibid.*). More recently, even as the Indian government supports the influx of greater numbers of Hindu pilgrims for the Amarnath Yatra every year, it has banned Muharram processions since 1990 for alleged security reasons, despite its claims that the situation has improved considerably (see Mehdi 2012).

When Abir had said, “Given what has happened here [in Kashmir]... [Shahid] would have certainly gone deeper”, he had hinted at these historical continuities (Abir *op. cit.*). It was these continuities of Muslim experience in the Valley that lay at the root of Abir’s discomfort with the easiness of the image of the young Shahid as Krishna, the poet’s choicest self-image. The smoothness of that image held the troubled history of Kashmiri Muslims hostage to an intensely personal and exceptional experience of the dissolution of one’s religion into another, proposing a coexistence that did not “substantially realize the question of difference”, which instead short-circuited it. As a mnemonic, the image did not index the experiences of a vast number of Kashmiri Muslims whose religion was simultaneously a millstone and an intimate channel to make long-held political and economic demands, who did not diametrically oppose secularism against religious investment, who saw togetherness of faiths not as a denial of their specificities or of religion’s imminence in politics, and who often found in the utterance of the name of Allah the utterance also of freedom. When Indians next hear Kashmiris shouting the slogan, *Azadi ka matlab kya? La ilaha illa Allah!* (What does *Azadi* mean? There is no god but God) – and by no means will this be the only slogan they hear; for instance *Ham kya chahte? Azadi* (What do we want? Freedom) will be as, if not more, frequent – at that point, before the Indians immediately project each of them only as cinema-burning, bar-banning, burkha-advocating, ‘unsecular’, ‘hardliner’, ‘Islamic fundamentalists’, they should wait and lend their ear to the political demand of Kashmiris against the Indian occupation that has lain for years within the openly religious cry. ■

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FROM NETWORKS TO THE STREET

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS AND LOCAL ISSUES

Aline Carvalho

The debate on the democratic system – the political construction of a society in a determinate historical moment – is not new. But the rise of networks in digital spaces has made possible increasingly globalised social movements, linked via an unprecedentedly larger connection that expands pre-existing social practices. If technology does not of itself guarantee societal change, the communication potential of these networks might contribute to the realisation of old aspirations such as autonomy, cooperation, sustainability and democracy.

In analysing the discursive strategies employed in the alterglobalisation movement of the mid-1990s and the Occupy movement 12 years later, what interests us here is the potential of these movements to gather together geographically disparate people through digital networks for global political action. What are the differences and similarities of these movements, according to their different economic, political and technological contexts? Which communication strategies do they employ? In mobilising people, what is the role of the narratives created around these collective actions? Based on their participants' discourses, we draw some observations on these movements on a global scale, taking into account the collective imaginary created in this context.

Towards Another Globalisation

The origins of the alterglobalisation movement lie in the political, economic and cultural context of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War struggle for ideological supremacy between capitalism and socialism. Capitalism in its neoliberal form was presented during the 1990s as

the best possible economic solution, with globalisation the natural and positive consequence of what was considered a historic societal advance. The networking of financial systems and the upward graph of consumption were celebrated in the media as a new era, leaving divergent opinions restricted only to small circles.

In this transition from a 'bipolarised' to a 'globalised' world, the heads of state of the American continents found occasion to celebrate the 'Fifth Centenary of the Discovery of America', considered by political elites as 'the first globalisation'. Indigenous sectors denounced the event both by way of identity affirmation and as a social claim, choosing to commemorate the anniversary by recalling their own reality instead – five centuries of resistance to domination.¹ The same period also saw Mexico's Zapatista Army of National Liberation, an indigenous guerrilla movement, organise resistance to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), denouncing it as an extension of the United States' economic domination of their country. On 1 January 1994, the day NAFTA came into effect, they rose up in rural Mexico's Chiapas district, amid great popular support. Although it came under armed forces counter-attack within a day, the Zapatista uprising is considered the first movement against liberal globalisation.

New technologies of information and communication, chief being the Internet, played a key role in the spread of the protests. Instead of the vertical organisation of traditional left-wing parties, the Internet's decentralised configuration allowed for the rhizomatic logic claimed by the Zapatistas. With intermediaries uploading videos of Zapatista speeches,

this became the first peasant struggle to spread on a global scale (although still restricted to activist circles). This strategy was even considered by conservatives and traditional media as a ‘cyber-war’: an “emergent mode of social conflict”, organised through “large multi-organisational networks without a clear national identity, claiming to come from civil society”, that apply “some traditional war tactics” combined with “strategies and technologies adapted to the information era”, generating a “militant, social and networked war prototype”.²

Although the informational aspect of the Zapatista uprising played a considerable role in the opposition to liberal globalisation, sociologist Yves Le Bot notes that its main contribution was the creation of a “new political discourse”, pointing to the existence of a Fourth World War (the Cold War being the third), the war of neoliberalism against humanity.³ Two years later, their resistance was amplified at the Zapatista Intercontinental Gathering for Humanity and Against Neo-liberalism, which convened at Chiapas in 1996. The meeting assembled around 3,000 persons from about 40 different countries, most coming from the so-called New Social Movements, those active on issues facing ecologists and socially underprivileged and/or marginalised groups. Le Bot remarks that it was a moment of reflection for those new movements themselves, manifesting their diversity and globality with the convergence of specific struggles around a common enemy: neoliberalism.

Refusing the limitations of parties or national frontiers, the globalisation of social movements is understood as a riposte to neoliberalism on a global scale. According to Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos, the movement is a “network of voices that come from resistance, and that reproduces this resistance through other voices, until then silenced and isolated”.⁴ In this sense, during the 90s, critics of neoliberal globalisation increased by the creation of transnational activist networks, gathered around People’s Global Action (PGA), an alliance of struggle and mutual

support in a worldwide coordination of resistances to the global market.

Indymedia: the Independent Media Centers

The network that Subcomandante Marcos claimed in 1996 in Chiapas was in fact achieved in December 1999 in the US, at Seattle. Thousands of protesters converged at the first summit of the newly-established World Trade Organization (WTO), closing off access roads and impeding the arrival of delegates, leading to the implosion of the meet. Aiming to utilise the big mediatisation of the event to denounce the negative effects of globalisation, the production of self-generated content emerged as an important strategy for the mobilisation, and a website (www.indymedia.org) was created for this purpose. An Independent Media Center (IMC) was also organised as a physical resource space for basic journalistic needs: charging batteries, checking email, uploading content, etc.

Based on grass-roots decision-making processes and open meetings, Indymedia enabled collaborations such as sharing of resources, content and equipment. Filmmaker and alterglobalisation protester DeeDee Halleck tells us that while the website became “a virtual center for activist discussions and multi-media posts of demonstration preparations”, the IMC turned out to be a gathering point not only for media producers, but also for the demonstration organisers.⁵ Sheri Herndon, a Seattle IMC founder, attests that “one of the things that was pretty powerful is that we weren’t really fazed about working together. We had a short-term common goal. The smaller differences, you just let them go”.⁶

While the working space filled a practical need, the website allowed the circulation of coverage of demonstrations happening in other cities in solidarity with the Seattle protest – which hugely contributed to its spread. More and more people wanted information about it, and, despite local media attempts to throttle it, the fact that an alternative information source was available spread, Halleck tells us, “like wildfire” on

the net. What was unusual, she explains, “was the sense that this was a world-wide community linked by technology that was discussing an immediate, emergency situation, whose outcome no one could predict”.

The Indymedia project emerged from criticism not only of power distribution in the media system, but also of the fake ‘journalistic neutrality’ that many times ends up hiding the truth. Working under the same aim of providing alternatives rather than only contesting, Indymedia put forward the slogan: ‘Don’t Hate the Media, Be the Media’. Journalist Gal Beckerman remarks that they had “found a technology that [fit] philosophically with their ideas about how to transform the media”. He highlights that what had started as a collective action in response to a practical need during the Seattle demonstrations became a “universal prototype” of independent information production. According to him, it soon became evident that Indymedia’s format was interesting to activists worldwide, not only as a way to cover demonstrations, but also as a journalistic report of local and global issues as told by their advocates. The initiative encouraged the creation of IMCs and websites worldwide. In this sense, those mediactivists were echoing the Zapatista commandant’s call to “construct a different way to show the world what is really happening, to have a critical world view, and to become interested in the truth of what happens to the people who inhabit every corner of this world”.⁷

From an Anti-globalisation to an Alter-globalisation

These articulated actions aimed to show that the neoliberal model is more a political construction than a natural process. The expression ‘antiglobalisation’, used in the beginning of the protests, was adopted by mass media in order to label the movement as restrictive and violent, not to facilitate consideration of its deeper engagements. However, under the slogan ‘Think Globally, Act Locally’, the movement reached beyond issuing denunciations alone to instead provide concrete alternatives to the problems it identified. In

this sense, we observe a symbolic displacement from ‘anti’-globalisation protests into an ‘alter’-globalisation movement – a more constructive approach than simply contesting the global political and economic networking process.

After Seattle, the direct intervention of protesters at neoliberal conclaves used to be the main occasion to discuss strategies and organise action. But the need for a proper space for a more propositive articulation led to the creation in 2001 of the World Social Forum (WSF), under the slogan ‘Another World is Possible’. According to its Charter of Principles, WSF is an “open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action”. Through conferences, debates and self-managed activities, short- and long-term actions are articulated, despite its non-deliberative character.

According to Brazilian activist Chico Whitaker, one of the WSF’s creators, this mobilisation relativises the idea of ‘movement’ itself. Instead of referring to an organised collective action, led by militant activists under specific and limited goals, it is more a larger process of social pressure around common targets that mobilises all interested parties to achieve them. Based on “non-violent civil disobedience and constructive actions directed by the people”, these events were organised under a decentralised and autonomous logic that did not intend to have official leaders or hierarchy among the various movements that were part of them.⁸

However, as a political space widens to include more people, it also tends to host actors who are more or less engaged in disputing its political power. The recognition achieved by the WSF has naturally attracted the attention of more traditional movements and left-wing parties that do not always work under the principles of autonomy and decentralisation that originally designed the Forum. Today, former PGA activist Pablo Ortellado, currently a Universidade de São Paulo researcher, understands the WSF as “structured exactly on the same basis as the World Economic Forum:

a meeting of global leaders to discuss global programs... having a bureaucratic and elitist structure".⁹

Besides, violent direct acts in demonstrations during the 2011 G8 meeting in Genoa, Italy, sparked a serious repression from the local government, leading to an activist's death and over 200 people being injured. A few months after the fall of the World Trade Center in September 2011, nationalist feelings were reignited worldwide, which reinforced governmental repression of any kind of pro-people movement. In this way, while the alterglobalisation debate was starting to get more consistent, protests at global meetings were becoming less frequent.

Discussions and previous experiences had contributed to the maturation of the movement, which started to develop other courses of action and take advantage of new tools for communication. Thus we observe three general factors that helped its spread through digital networks: state repression of social movements on the streets, the apparent success of globalisation and consumerism, and, principally, the social networks boom of the 2000s.

Spanish researcher Mayo Fuster Morell has observed different moments in the integration of new technologies by the alterglobalisation movement since the start of the decade. First to emerge, during the 1990s, was what she calls a gestation stage, with the creation of "transnational connections around specific themes... but in absence of a common, global framework", when new social movements started to gather in order to contest some aspects of neoliberal globalisation.¹⁰

Morell next remarks on the creation of an "online infrastructure of communication and international coordination" – the IMCs, Internet mailing lists, open publishing and user-generated content tools that led to a "diffuse connective environment". Once this tendency towards pairing global movement with local action increased, the need arose, says Morell, to "democratise the access to the knowledge that the confluence process creates" – a need

answered in, for instance, the proliferation of IMC initiatives and tactical media workshops at WSF meetings.

Finally Morell turns to highlight the growth, since 2004, of platforms of user-generated content like YouTube, MySpace and Flickr. She adds that although online platforms were already being used for political purposes, what was new in 'Web 2.0' was the use of websites provided by commercial companies, a development that has left activist opinion divided. "On the one hand, they permit an increased interest in the use of multi-interactive web tools and enable reaching a larger audience. On the other hand, they pose questions in terms of loss of rights, privacy and security and control over communications". Besides, the use of commercial tools is contrary to the development of an autonomous communication infrastructure within a global movement regarding social justice.

Indeed, this contradiction is part of a larger complexity concerning methods of struggle, which has somehow led to two trends in post-Seattle mobilisations: first, a militant gathering around the WSF of traditional left-wing organisations; second, autonomous groups, inspired by free software and copyleft principles, preferring more direct action through tactical media and computer hacking. However, these two types of action are not completely at odds and were somehow mostly in dialogue.

Eight years later, in a quite different political and economic context, this link between networks and streets is claimed by the Occupy movement. Keeping the occupation of public spaces as a metaphor for the re-occupation of public spaces of power, the demonstrations that took place in such different squares as Midaan Al-Tahrir in Egypt, Puerta del Sol in Spain and Zuccotti Park in the US have repositioned the debate about a global action of contesting the system.

Global Connections and Collective Action

If in the 1990s the rejection of neoliberal globalisation took place in an atmosphere characterised by high economic

development, the Occupy movement puts the influence of financial powers on political dynamics into question, in a time of economic crisis. But unlike political movements engaged in claiming more democratic behaviour from their governments, what we observe in those mobilisations is democracy itself being questioned, even while the call is for a larger participation of civil society in political decisions. Under a collective feeling of non-conformity to prevailing systems, the creation and use of camps proposes experimenting with new forms of governance and sociability, unlike the punctual demonstration for big meetings that was alterglobalisation's first strategy.

Thereby, we consider that the January 2011 demonstrations in North Africa inspired the occupations that took place in Spain in May that year, which were repeated five months later on Wall Street in October, spreading to other cities worldwide. During the Spanish 15M camps, social activists from different countries got in contact with each other and organised through digital networks a joint, transnational mobilisation on 15 October, under the slogan 'Together for Global Change'. This global demonstration brought hundreds of thousands of people to the streets in more than 950 cities in 82 countries around the world.¹¹ The call on their website explains that:

The key of 15 Oct should not be just mobilizing people, and doing some actions simultaneously, but being conscious that the world is acting together, and therefore starting to build a network between all of us... We know that the powers are global, that we live in a globalized world, and therefore our answer should be global too.¹²

Just as was raised by the alterglobalisation movement, the main problems in the current system – and therefore their solutions – don't depend on one government alone, but are directly attached to transnational organisations from

the WTO to the United Nations. Though concerns about the environment, the financial system and war refusal are highlighted around the world, establishing priorities on such a wide and diverse scale is much more complex. Each country has its own internal dynamics and priorities, and for this reason, the common ground found by these mobilisations is the fact that governments for the most part do not quite represent the citizens who elected them.

Of course, a better understanding of each country's mobilisation issues requires a closer look into its socio-political particularities. But, in a general way, as Eric Fourgier remarks, the alterglobalisation protests are related to local sphere debates, projected at a global scale.¹³ Fourgier highlights some general aspects of protests across different regions of the world: critics in industrialised countries, for instance, are made most concerned by multinational companies, as can be seen in the denunciations in the US of the corporate system, and in Europe of its financial and cultural dimensions. In Asia and Africa, mobilisations are mainly against local governments, while in Latin America, the imperialism of financial institutions is the main issue, with globalisation understood as a 're-colonisation' process. Yet, believes Fourgier, the main force of alterglobalisation is in clustering a number of local struggles into a global movement around the rejection of neoliberalism combined with different principles such as respect for diversity and the rejection of hierarchical, centralised organisation – at least in theory.

At the Occupy gatherings, digital and offline cooperation has been one of the most important points of the movement. One of its participants, independent journalist Alba Muñoz witnesses that

the way we behave at camps is exactly the same as on networks: a distributed and transversal movement, where nobody and at the same time everybody makes rules, and where the digital work was essential to arrive at a common goal.¹⁴

Digital technology thus increased solidarity and cooperation between networks and streets. The use of smartphones, for example, has made a difference, enabling a larger registry and diffusion of images of police violence, as did the expansion of wifi networks at Occupy camps through hacking mobile phones connected to the Internet. Such alterglobalisation experiments enabled what Halleck points to as a “truly a global village never imagined by McLuhan”. She remarks on the Indymedia experience that a

sense of connection and an understanding of the power not only of the technology that could create this linkage, but the power and size of the community around the world who were in agreement with the protesters created an exhilaration among people who often feel outnumbered and defeated.¹⁵

Under the same feeling, the group Democracia Real Ya, one of the main actors at the Spanish camps, highlights that social networks

had a major role in allowing many people who had never been part of a collective struggle before, to surpass shyness, solitude and their own concerns by meeting in a common space to exchange ideas. A virtual square to learn, debate and make politics, whose force is increased when those spaces turn into face-to-face assemblies.¹⁶

The problems with public exposure of political action over commercial social networks, however, became more evident after the experience of the Arab Spring. In this way, if Twitter and Facebook were largely used by Occupy to publicise information, independent and alternative tools for internal organisation were also developed. The social network N-1, created in 2009 by the Spanish hackers' collective Lorea,

enables the creation of blogs, forums and mailing lists under different privacy levels. Takethesquare.net was created, like N-1, with free software and open sources to gather information about the movement on a global scale. Platforms like Indymedia, Adbusters and Global Voices have been used to share and disseminate alternative information in spite of mass media coverage that tries, as in Seattle, to stifle the reach of events.

We thus observe that the creation of these collective narratives aims for a common action through a shared imaginary, which shows that more than technological support, these gatherings are based on affective relations. Rather than a political movement organised around concrete goals and principles, these mobilisations bring together social actors who recognise themselves as personally committed to a common issue, a commitment whose reach is heightened by the possibility of broader and faster communication through digital networks. The page “We are all Khaled Said”, for example, with more than 200,000 Facebook fans, aims to preserve the memory of the young man killed by officials during demonstrations in Egypt in mid-2010. It has become a symbol of the struggle against police violence in the country, and has been widely referred as an example of the use of digital tools in contemporary activism. The affirmation “We are all Khaled Said”, honouring a young victim until then unknown like so many others, reinforces the identity, anonymity and collective nature of these mobilisations on social networks.

In the same vein, the Occupy protests in the US called for solidarity under the slogan, “We are the 99 percent” – of the population that must submit to the decisions of the one percent with whom power is concentrated. Just like the alterglobalisation inscription on the walls of Seattle, “We are Winning”, or the anti-war posters, “Not in My Name”, these new expressions reconfigure the idea of collective action against the concentration of power on a global scale.

Ever since the Zapatistas' first claim to a global resistance, we observe a transversal meeting of different

social classes – liberal workers, the unemployed, students, independent artists, foreigners, etc. Parties are rejected; most of the movement's actors have never taken part in militant action before. More specifically, in the Occupy mobilisations, representative democracy is clearly put into question – what traditional social movements in other times claimed as citizens' rights – and this turning point might suggest the rise of a new militant generation.

From this perspective, and observing the collective imaginary created around global issues, the movements presented here represent new kinds of communities, linked by an ideological convergence that does not erase local contexts. The main point of these movements is in their subjective aspect: the imaginary built around the possibility of a collective action. Their collaborative environment made the basis for a further understanding of the role of the state. Globally, we keep connected with new challenges and discoveries, and the establishment of this dialogue may be the key to moving forward in this #globalrevolution. ■

Notes

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LANCHONETE

Todd Lester



Over a series of short visits and long stays in São Paulo, Brazil, since 2005, I observed that the *lanchonete* (lunch counter) due to its ubiquitous presence and porous, open-front or open-corner design remains a place where the upper and lower economic classes share middle ground – if only to take a *cafezinho* and *pao de queijo* standing at the same counter – in an otherwise swiftly stratifying and fortifying city.

Lanchonete is a time and site-specific artist residency project, with an underlying focus on alternative economy, modes of exchange and societal witnessing in a neighbourhood in the centre of São Paulo, an area home to economic migrants from across South America and undergoing

rapid gentrification. As Latin American cities go, São Paulo is the big, tough kid on the block. With over 20 million inhabitants, São Paulo, a.k.a. Sampa or *Cidade da Garoa* (City of Drizzle), is perhaps best characterised by its Latin motto *Non ducor, duco*, which translates as “I am not led, I lead”.

Precarity is a term being popularised within the arts community as the state of being dispossessed, with conditions varying from having one's labour disassociated from intellect; exploitative working conditions; alternative collective forms lacking legitimacy; and the deleterious effect of capitalistic fantasies – e.g., zero-sum game, post-fordism, pareto optimality – on livelihood and general security. Influenced by these same conditions, the notion of an artist residency becomes unmoored and stops being the inhabiting of a space for the sake of solidarity on the one hand, and hospitality in the service of nurturing avant-garde ideas on the other... a bilateral agreement between community and guest, and thus a joint aspiration to empower creativity. Similarly, those desirous of mobility may distinguish – and thus exempt – themselves from those for whom the reality of economic migration is levied as a penalty by an opaque system of global capital... a burgeoning contemporary polis, tens of thousands of people who arrive daily as newcomers – termed wretched (Fanon), *homo sacer* (Agamben), subaltern (Spivak) – from zones of conflict or economic crisis to relatively calmer milieus where they achieve ostensible safety while often losing their right to have rights (Arendt) as a consequence.



The project, these images and this text all fall under the title of Lanchonete, but *titles* are given to books, usually after they are completed. So, to cast Lanchonete as a projection or as a generative vision of the future lowers the scrim of project management and invites a frank analysis of risk-taking and inherent uncertainty.

I recently landed in São Paulo for a week-long research residency



(15-21 October 2012). I use the 'artist residency' moniker to name (and describe) this period as well as the overall Lanchonete project, while also explicitly questioning the role of newcomers artists as temporary, short-term inhabitants, drawn to fast-changing urban communities through similar circumstances as those that hold a tractor beam between me and the centre of São Paulo.





Whereas I am unable to think about artist mobility as anything more or less than a subset of human mobility left unchecked, the notion of 'artist residency' attaches itself to capital (and vice versa) via non-profit funding streams, and thus enters a neoliberal economic vernacular – alongside cultural diplomacy – at the crosshairs

of culture funding and nation-statism. As both trope and meme, artist residency becomes a placebo of artist inclusion that simultaneously downplays the need for deep thinking by artists on critical issues, and the idea that innovation resulting from such critical engagement is the primary justification for artist mobility in the first place.

On the other hand, artists are often instrumentalised through compliance with a deployment mentality of state cultural exchange programmes, which are tantalising (and more easily deflect analysis) in the under-resourced space of artists working for social change, irrespective of national borders and foreign policy agendas.



Lanchonete is a five-year journey that culminates in and around a typical *lanchonete* in the centre of São Paulo. The first half of the project is for creating an administration and documenting the unfolding bureaucratic process of starting a business in Brazil as an outsider, as well as becoming known and building trust in the community in which the restaurant is situated. The first years will be characterised by site prospecting; asking everything in a phenomenological spirit and weaving new inputs into programme design; explaining myself publically until it feels right; and – ultimately – asking to join a community that is not yet my own.

The second half of that period will be running the business (contiguous performance) and the neighbourhood artist residency (series of vignettes) for which the *lanchonete* is a physical and conceptual anchor... in its design, one performance does not work



without the other. Business as Trojan horse, Lanchonete learns from, plays with and rigorously interrogates the utopic template of artist residency. The *lanchonete* will have a staff and operate as a bottom line-oriented business; international residents will be invited to live in a suite of adjacent apartments for periods of four to six months; local artists and cultural organisers will join the project in other ways. Whereas I will oversee the restaurant as a business, I can only referee artists' engagement with the surrounding community – lightly chalking out parameters for its participants – and in that role, strive to engender an atmosphere in which distinctions between worker and guest, international and local will blur as the project, a time-release capsule, dissolves into the city.

The open call for artists does not seek a film screening within the space of the restaurant nor a traditional exhibition on its walls, but asks artists to engage the vernacular architecture and practices of its environs, and in so doing invite its customers to – or include them in – something new or seeing something old differently... an overlay to quotidian patterns... moving from imagery to imaginary. Some artists will join Lanchonete through a bartering and pre-booking approach, influenced by projects such as New Life Copenhagen, the Homebase Project (NYC) and the Berlin Office,

which has already begun and will gradually populate up to 50 percent of the residency capacity for the period 2015-2017; however the open call for ideas and expressions of interest is as simple as reacting to this text at saopaulolanchonete@gmail.com.

Boiled down, Lanchonete is a constructive critique of the growing/vague-ing residency sector; a contemplation on gentrification as a way of life (one that is related to other 'ations', for e.g. globalisation, brazilianification,¹ commodification); a workplace and station of witness... the panopticon remixed.

The images used here are from a meandering walk I took through São Paulo's Centro with local photographer, Pedro Marques.

The kickoff of Lanchonete happened on Saturday, 20 October 2012, with the research and production support of Casa das Caldeiras,² through artistic consultation and event production by Ghawazee Coletivo,³ and was hosted at Pivô⁴ at Edifício Copan, the most beautiful building in the world. Follow the Lanchonete from projection to realisation on the Residency Unlimited⁵ dialogue platform. ■



Notes

- 1 Brazilianification is defined as the process by which the middle class disappears, and the gulf between the upper and lower classes widens.
- 2 Casa das Caldeiras is a cultural space in the Matarazzo basin near the centre of São Paulo. <http://www.casadascaldeiras.com.br/> (last accessed 15 February 2013).
- 3 Ghawazee is a transdisciplinary performance action collective made up of women with different artistic backgrounds, which investigates the expressions of the feminine through artistic actions presented in public spaces. The collective is searching for the creation of an experimental language [and] practice that forges temporary, transgressive disruptions in the order of everyday life through artistic actions, intended mostly for the local, found and unforeseen public. <https://www.facebook.com/ghawaseecoletivo/info> (last accessed 15 February 2013).
- 4 Pivô is an independent platform dedicated to the investigation of contemporary processes of cultural creation. It intends to promote critical thinking on art, architecture, urbanism, as well as other contemporary manifestations by enticing a dialogue between creators, producers, scholars, students and the general public. Within its set of strategies, Pivô is contributing to the revitalisation process of downtown São Paulo, with emphasis on the uniqueness of Copan building and its surroundings. <http://www.pivo.org.br/> (last accessed 15 February 2013).
- 5 Residency Unlimited (RU) creates tailored environments of network/technical and logistical support for artists and curators in all disciplines and at all stages of their practice. RU facilitates artists' visions by activating meaningful connections and supporting the realisation of projects on a case-to-case basis. The Lanchonete Dialogue can be found at <http://www.residencyunlimited.org/category/dialogues/lanchonete/> (last accessed 15 February 2013).

RIO CIDADE OLÍMPICA

Yuri Queiroz Abreu Torres + Lucia Maria Sá Antunes Costa

- I -

THE IDEA OF LANDSCAPE has been through different approaches along time. It is an evolving concept, revealing distinct ways of seeing the same subject. One of the ways of approaching landscape is from the perspective of experience. From this perspective, landscape cannot be acknowledged as only the material setting for human experience. Landscape is also embedded with values and meanings that stem both from its particular physical and built characteristics as well as from values and meanings ascribed by those who experience it; its values and meanings are subject to different appropriations and interpretations.

LANDSCAPE CAN BE EXPERIENCED in a variety of ways, ranging from being in the landscape itself or through the mediation of films, pictures, books, sketches, conversations, mappings, among many others, and more recently through digital space. In fact, digital space has dramatically increased our opportunities of landscape experience, opening up an interdisciplinary field of landscape research.

LANDSCAPE DOES NOT HAVE A PASSIVE CHARACTER, but rather an active one (Corner 1999). Our experience of landscape is also shaped by it, and therefore landscape plays an active role in the construction of cultures. When relating landscape's active role with the concept of productive digital space, a new range of informing and modifying our landscape experience can be observed.

OVER THE LAST TEN TO 15 YEARS, ubiquitous computing has been mediating our experience of landscapes. Widespread connection through common objects, such as watches, bicycles and cars will soon enable interaction with urban landscape, equipment and infrastructures, as well as access in real time to information on traffic, communications, public space conditions and maintenance. The spread of wireless access in public open spaces reinforces this practice, allowing connected citizens to post and share information concurrently with events, energising and activating the spaces (Barlow 2007). Contemporary citizens move freely on digital networks, beyond the territorial space traditionally understood as the city, and the roles played by digital social space in the construction of landscapes bring an emerging field of contemporary landscape research that has to be further explored.

THE DIGITAL SPACE PLAYS A ROLE IN LANDSCAPE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS, particularly concerning citizen participation. Engaged, connected citizens and their perceptions and attitudes towards cities turn them into potential active agents of landscape construction and transformation (Costa and Torres 2012). However, even as participatory planning has become fashionable, a matter of common sense even, in mainstream planning practice, it has not followed the technological advances accompanying changes in society behaviour.

- II -

AS WITH MANY OTHER WORLD-CLASS CITIES, Rio de Janeiro has been through dramatic landscape changes along its history. Created in the 16th century on the shorelines of Guanabara Bay, the history of the city is also a history of landscape transformation. Marshes, ponds and small rivers were filled, forests cut down, hills demolished, shorelines redesigned, old houses and buildings were knocked down to give place to new ones, avenues were enlarged and streets disappeared – all for the sake of adapting the city landscape to new values and meanings of what it is like to be urban and civilised.

THE MAJORITY OF RIO'S URBAN LANDSCAPE TRANSFORMATIONS took place without any citizen participation whatsoever. It does not mean, however, that Rio's landscape does not reveal the variety of its inhabitants' ways of living – a number of landscapes of resistance such as the *favelas* (informal settlements), for instance, are typical examples of Rio's unique interplay of landscape and culture.

- III -

OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES, Rio de Janeiro has experienced important contemporary urban landscape redevelopments, put forward by the municipal government.

In 1993, Projeto Rio Cidade (Rio-City Programme) was conceived by the municipal government with a commitment to redesign and reorganise a number of Rio's neighbourhoods through the design of their main high streets and surrounding open spaces. The concrete target was the valuing of streets and urban open spaces, regulating their usage and improving urban functional and aesthetical standards (see IPLANRio 1996). The idea behind fostering shopping districts and promoting a pedestrian-friendly, active street life was also to promote public debate within neighbourhood associations during the planning process in order to set up well-balanced achievable scenarios.

IN THE BEGINNING OF THE 2000s, Programa Favela Bairro (Slum-to-Neighbourhood Programme) was an attempt to reverse the process of urban decline that generally follows the rapid growth of the *favelas*, and to integrate those communities into the formal city by promoting improvements in urban infrastructure and providing urban facilities and social benefits (Duarte *et al.* 1996). Architectural firms, in partnership with community agents, were in charge of developing new plans and ideas for the improvement and use of public and private spaces. Far from achieving its initial purpose, with much criticism of the participatory stages, the programme has been unable to consolidate the insertion of the *favelas* into the city's planning process to date.

NOWADAYS Rio de Janeiro is experiencing a massive wave of landscape transformations in the context of the upcoming international events, the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics. Billion-dollar investments in mobility, urban layout improvements, land use revision with incentives for private entrepreneurs, urbanisation of *favelas* and investments in the built environment are some of the strategies the municipality is adopting to once again turn the city into a prestigious touristic, business and entertainment metropolis.

DESPITE FORMER EXPERIENCES AND METHODOLOGICAL ADVANCES, some consider current urban planning practices in Rio de Janeiro as mega-events directed solely by politicians and entrepreneurs

(Schwambach 2011). The upcoming events in Rio are being projected as a turning point of urban transformation, with their legacy for the city and its citizens very present in official speech. Large amounts of public investments are expected over the next few years, but the planning practices seem to remain in a traditional top-bottom direction.

- IV -

With the popularisation of the Internet and the advance of social media, new channels have been opened for public awareness and dialogue, more widespread and accessible than those during the 90s. However, it seems that the municipal and planning agencies have incorporated the digital platform more as a window to promote urban propaganda than as a tool to facilitate citizen participation in Rio's new landscape transformation.

Free access to information is a prerequisite for citizens to effectively exercise their right to participate in the changes the city is undergoing. In Rio, this information has been released to the public in digital format, constantly updated, feeding an expanding official and extra-official database (Costa and Torres 2012).

- V -

CIDADE OLÍMPICA (www.cidadeolimpica.com) is the official webpage Rio de Janeiro's Municipal Olympic Company has created to portray the transformations the city is undertaking for and during its preparations to host the 2016 Summer Olympics. The online platform merges official information from various municipal agencies and adorns them with appealing event marketing to become the city's main publicity channel. Highlighting Rio's most important physical and social transformations, the site's homepage claims to welcome everyone to participate in the changes that are underway through videos, photos, 3D animations, reports and documentaries, posted and spread through the major social media networks. It has five main thematic navigation links: transportation, infrastructure, environment, social and institutional, each populated with attractive images and videos, and with profuse links to social networks and web-sharing services. Shortened links, embedded codes and exchangeable interfaces all combine to draw in audiences in search of hands-on browsing and more sharing functions.

Being a showcase of the city's major territorial transformations, the official webpage, with international versions in both English and Spanish, has also adopted social media as a faster, more efficient tool to reach and communicate with the general public. As observed on other platforms, when information is shared and replicated in social media, the audience tends to concentrate its attention and 'react' to it in the place where it happens to be shared and where the interface is more user-friendly, less formal, more immediate and interactive. Open space for comments, suggestions and questions has, then, become nearly non-existent on the official homepage.

- VI -

Most of the posts and press material shared throughout the three main social media networks (YouTube, Twitter and Facebook) highlight mega infrastructural transportation, Olympic venues and even social housing enterprises.

CIDADE OLÍMPICA'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL (since 2011) has over two hundred videos; it has more than 1,500 subscriptions and 100,000 single views. The videos posted, most of them related to major infrastructure and transportation works, have drawn over 1.8 million views. The channel background screen and navigation board depict the official website and facilitate browsing through specific themes.

THE EVENT'S TWITTER PROFILE now counts roughly 14,000 followers but has experienced a decrease in direct followers in the last six months, after a peak of over 16,000 followers. An average 2,000 tweet actions took place during weekday business hours, when the maximum audience is potentially connected to the Internet. Statistics show that account followers tend to republish messages into their own accounts to reach their own followers instead. Nearly 20 percent of all Cidade Olímpica tweets have been re-tweeted or replied, which may indicate a low level of interaction between end-users and their respective followers and between account managers and end-users. As a matter of fact, it is observed that the platform has been used more as a source of timely information than as an open channel for discussion and collaborative work.

THE CIDADE OLÍMPICA FACEBOOK ACCOUNT has more than 200,000 likes (as of November 2012) and is by far the most popular and interactive social channel of the three. Young adults in their 20s comprise the largest and most vigorous age group here, which can explain the notable dynamism of every post. In this profile, users are more active in showing their opinions and interacting with each other.

CONCERNS HAVE BEEN RAISED over information manipulation and public alienation at propagandistic posts (accompanied by distorted or unrealistic 3D previews of future projects and developments) that cover most of the tensions existing between the decision-making process and confrontations with local communities. Such issues are some of those most raised in posts – and never answered. None of the three social media networks are used to promote discussion and gather public opinion on issues the city is dealing with that may already affect them directly.

- VII -

IN THE NEXT DECADE, THE WEBSITE ANNOUNCES, Rio de Janeiro aims at becoming the best city of the South to live, work in and visit. As for that, socially cohesive territories must be created to enhance the quality of urban life. Great steps are being undertaken with immediate impacts to the city as a whole, and are decisive in claiming urban space for citizens, not speculators.

UNTIL RECENT YEARS, all urban planning-related information was scarce, difficult to analyse and fragmented across many public agencies. Cidade Olímpica, along with its social media counterparts, has the potential to gather connected citizens and engage them in planning, more than do individualised agencies in related, ongoing projects.

- VIII -

TO CONCLUDE, the majority of landscape transformation and planning methods are top-down driven and hardly consider bottom-up dynamics, although organisations and agencies are increasingly using social networks for publicising urban planning and updating stages in construction work. These emerging networks are interesting alleys to explore and have the

potential to change from being mere cases of horizontal connectivity to becoming dynamic platforms for the mediation of participation throughout the process

DIGITAL SOCIAL NETWORKS ARE STILL IN THEIR INFANCY, and there is much more to come. A comment posted on planning in a social network is valuable, and can become a part of public testimony or a substitute for formal statements. Additionally, since participatory processes have always been open voice-based, and since discussions on virtual privacy and surveillance are emerging, managing useful digital information while simultaneously ensuring anonymity is something programmers should work on in cooperation with agencies. Better programmed interfaces with customised contents are also key issues in allowing citizens to choose how much they wish to contribute and to avoid scepticism in the process. It is proven that strong community support produces better plans, but a lot of time and effort in planning is still wasted in fighting off badly formed opinions and information. Since public discussion should start in earlier stages of planning, wide elementary planning education should be encouraged and provided for the community as well. ■

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WATCHING INDIAN CINEMA IN SOUTH AFRICA

Saba Sharma

Researching films in South Africa is a curious business. Part of the predicament arises from legitimising it as a valid field of research. This is more of an issue where popular cinema is concerned, for it is seen as frivolous and something people do to 'pass time'. Sometimes people will assume that this is some underhand way to gain a ticket to the film industry (although I am unable to think of a single starlet that studied her way to the red carpet); on occasion, they may provide unsolicited advice ("Look, if you have to go into the movie business, make sure you make films that have a moral, something to teach the audience").

In February 2011, I travelled to Durban and Cape Town to see how Indian films are watched in South Africa.¹ My original research question was to study the 'crossover' audience of Indian cinema – how would it be watched by those not guided by a sense of nostalgia or an enduring connection to the homeland (i.e., audiences of non-Indian descent)?² I went in armed with the idea of Brian Larkin's 'alternative modernity', a term derived from his study of the Muslim Hausa in Nigeria, who have been watching Indian films and consuming them with far more enthusiasm than is reserved for Hollywood.³ Larkin finds that despite the differences in religion and the emphasis on Hindu values and nationalism, Hausa viewers relate to the films. It is the opposition to Westernisation, the dress decorum that is always observed, the propriety of exchange between men and women, and the centrality of family and kinship that Hausa viewers find easy to identify with.⁴ In other words, the films offer a 'parallel modernity', one that does not identify the West as its locus.

Early in the course of my fieldwork, I realised this was not to be.⁵ My assumptions about crossover audiences presumed that the original consumers of the films, the Indians⁶ that had been in South Africa since the early 19th century, were an audience that was 'figured out' – similar to other diasporic audiences elsewhere in the world.⁷ As fieldwork took its course, I discovered that for most South African Indians, attitudes towards Indian cinema were often referenced via the West. Indeed, even the identification with South Africa (or for that matter India) appears to take a circuitous route that involves a seemingly paradoxical simultaneous acceptance and rejection of what is seen as 'Western'.

In South Africa, the Indian community has always had an ambivalent position, having been at a disadvantage with regard to some groups and more privileged with regard to others. The apartheid regime's colour-coded hierarchy meant that while Indians were never seen as full citizens, or equal to whites, they were generally treated better than Africans, if only marginally. However, apartheid transcended the political regime, so that its values have been internalised in present-day South African society, often leaving Indians contemptuous or fearful of Africans and deferential to whites. Within the South African Indian community, there is also a class divide. The first Indians to arrive came as indentured labour – a glorified term for slavery – to work on sugar plantations, and their descendants form a large part of South Africa's working-class Indian community today. In the latter part of the 19th century passenger-class Indians arrived as traders and businessmen; they were the ancestors of South Africa's Indian middle class.

These partitions are not absolute, of course; and while they may have existed between Indians, the apartheid regime made no distinction between them at all.

The narrative that emerges from talking about cinema is one of unease and uncertainty, which is why, while I thought I would explore cinema at the borderlands, in the space between races, I discovered that the Indians too exist in a borderland; they themselves are a space between races and also set apart from them. Cinema here became a means of exploring the Indian community's relation to a rapidly changing South Africa, and with a 'homeland' that has changed in ways sometimes too rapid and unpredictable, particularly for a community that itself was alienated from others during apartheid. Like most matters South African, the subject of diaspora Indians and films is coloured by the experience of living in an institutionally polarised country, where it became imperative to relate to one's own 'culture' as state and society alike set out to vehemently deny links and parallels between races.

Apartheid is not an easy past to forget, and its after effects are felt everywhere. Among the older generation of Indians, the last to remember apartheid experientially, this has meant an uneasy relationship with both South Africa and India, once a place of 'return', now unrecognisable. While there were harrowing memories and resentment towards the apartheid government, there was also a kind of nostalgia about apartheid having 'helped us keep our culture', and how 'being ruled by the white man was better than being ruled by the black man'. Bitter, and often racially tinged, references to 'reverse apartheid' and to not being 'black enough' are in no short supply. Says Farook, a retired journalist, "I was in the anti-apartheid struggle. But I've always been made to feel like a second-class citizen in this country".

According to him, many Indians feel this way, and there are an increased number of people applying for Indian citizenship, so they can 'return'. While this may not be a mainstream view, it is not unheard of. Hawa Bibi from

Cape Town, for instance, regrets that she and her husband never bought a house in Bombay to move to when he retired. "That's where I really feel at home. Here in Cape Town, if we go to a restaurant that's full of white people, I don't feel comfortable". Most South African Indians have ancestors that lived in rural India, and many of these 'going back' fantasies are centred around this idealised countryside. Farook wants to go to a village in India, grow vegetables and teach children English and Maths. The 'Hindu civilisation', as he terms it (with no apparent irony, given that his own religion is Islam), is a successful one. One lady expressed surprise, with barely concealed disappointment in her tone, that her great-grandparents' village was fairly modernised now – "Even the girls go to school".

As Hansen points out in his research in Durban, for most people, going 'back' is not an option. India is often not even an object of identification, let alone a destination for emigration.⁸ And yet, some of the more conservative members of the community, like Ashwin, would even go so far as to assert that "South African Indians are more Indian than Indian Indians". In his priest-cum-video-store-owner mould, he is fairly well-versed with the Hindu Capetonian Indian community, small as it is. At Hindu festivals, India is all about consumption, he says, it's all about buying things and getting drunk. But in South Africa, these festivals are still about religion and prayer. "We have kept our culture, while you have let it go. At one point, if you were a South African Indian and you went to Bombay, you stood out like a sore thumb because of the way you dressed. Now everybody in India wears the same kind of clothes. Look at you", he said, and with a single gesture implicated me (and my jeans) in the larger corruption that plagues Indian society.

This is not, of course, uniformly true of all South African Indians. By and large, the younger generation, the one that has grown up in a democratic South Africa, considers itself 'South African first'. Filmmaker Anant Singh identified himself at a lecture as 'black'; he was among the first to make anti-

apartheid films. Many Indians showed and continue to show solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement and the African National Congress.

One of the more interesting things about researching films is that because it is a seemingly safe and neutral subject, people will often say more, and speak of broader and deeper things, than they may have had they been questioned directly. For many people, talking about films brought up memories of apartheid, of being mocked for the 'silly' nature of Indian films. For the post-apartheid generation, Indian cinema was often a confusing phenomenon, referencing a place they had never known. And yet, an older generation laments the loss of Indian film stars as role models for their children. An elderly interviewee, while reminiscing about the erstwhile male protagonist of the 1960s and 70s as the 'ideal young man' said, "Maybe you think we're silly, taking all these stars so seriously. But you don't understand, we never had any role models before".

Talking about films is a way of talking about many things: about space and one's own place in the city, about morality and a relationship with what is seen as 'ours'. In many ways, the ways in which 'Indianness' is experienced in different diasporas is similar. Commoditised cultural nationalism is, in this age, easily accessible. In Appadurai's formulation, the work of the imagination is crucial to the notion of belonging, more so than territory itself. And the most important elements of this transformation, in his view, are migration and media.⁹ While the imagination has always been important in social life, Appadurai distinguishes the current era as one in which imagination is part of everyday life, and not merely the realm of art, legend or myth.¹⁰

Consumption is the social process through which people are drawn into the realm of fantasy. As Jean and John Comaroff have put it, consumption, once seen as a disease, is now the hallmark of modernity.¹¹ In the era of late capitalism, it has replaced production as a source of value and identity. As the individual becomes the most important

source of identity, especially in a Western conception, politics itself becomes personal.¹² Citizenship increasingly becomes about the ability to consume, and the maintenance of cultural or community survival is centred around personal issues of sexuality or family values.

To a great extent, this is reflected in South African Indian communities. In the discourse about contemporary Indian cinema, it is not uncommon to hear phrases like 'Bollywood is too Western now', 'too modern now', or even, as one bitter video shop owner put it, "Bollywood has become Hollywood".¹³ The emphasis was both on the element of time and on what is perceived as the violation of a cultural boundary in cinematic space. Thus, the cinema is seen as too modern now, implying that there was an earlier era where it represented something different and perhaps more meaningful. Additionally, if it has 'become Hollywood', it has failed to retain its distinctive 'Indianness'. One radio show host said people would call in to his show and say the films did not have 'enough' culture. Here culture is a potion; it can be diluted by 'foreign' influences.

Much of this discomfort is expressed through the changing dresses and the shift in the representation of female bodies and sexuality in Indian cinema. Farook recalls a movie in which the protagonist is abandoned by his new wife on the night of their wedding as she runs off with her lover. "How could they show an Indian woman doing that? Indian women would never be that immoral". Women, as important markers of cultural boundaries, are seen as both signifiers and transmitters of ethnic differences, and thus their transgressions become a focal point for what is seen as the corruption of Indian cinema and, by extension, culture. It remains relevant however, in the context of the cinematic representation of womanhood, that most filmmakers, both in India and Durban, are still men.

Another point of contention is the family. Haseena, who works at a video store in Durban, says, "Why can't the films be modern, but in an Indian way? *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham*

was modern, but it was still Indian, it was about the family". Kissing, until recently, was taboo in Indian films, although this has started changing. Many South Africans have expressed concern about this, citing, yet again, that this was 'not Indian culture'. The changing nature of the movies is seen as alienating families from watching films together. Many expressed concern that watching a film was one of the few things families would do together, thus Indian cinema was, in effect, partially responsible for ruptures in the family structure. The boundaries of 'Indianness' here are measured with variables like family and female bodies. Other 'Indian' issues, relating to civil society or political developments, are not engaged with. Thus, diaspora family films are well received as they are seen to retain, as Haseena says, a "modern but Indian" touch.

Some, like Farook, in fact accord what they see as the degradation of South African Indian society entirely to the shifting nature of Indian cinema. "In the 50s and 60s, Bollywood was the force that united Indians in South Africa. In those days, films had a social message, a moral. And look at us now". The increasing 'Westernisation' is seen as compromising the transmission of 'morals'. A good Indian film, according to most, should contain a 'message'; one should be able to learn something from watching it. Consequently, it is seen as the filmmaker's job to make sure the film is not only entertaining, but also educational. 'Educational' here seems to refer less to something new being learnt than to the reaffirmation of an erstwhile consensus. Whether or not it was ever a consensus is doubtful, but certainly the perception of its recent instability is real in the minds of many people.

Most of the complaints about the Westernisation of Indian cinema come from an older generation, one that has grown up during apartheid and has watched the change to a 'new' South Africa. Citizenship in South Africa was a perplexing concept during apartheid, but the fantasyland of cinema was an easier terrain to negotiate. Among the younger generation, engagement with Indian cinema has

more in common with diasporic youth in other parts of the world. They are less concerned (and some are even relieved) about the kissing and the skimpy clothes, and are more able to relate to the 'modern' characters in new films. Many would agree with Masood, a filmmaker in Durban, when he says, "Bollywood is so much cooler now". Their engagement with Indian cinema ranges from indifference to enthusiasm, but rarely stops to focus on the issue of declining morality.

Haseena concedes as much about her own children. "Kids, they like the movies for all the wrong reasons. They like it because someone is doing a sexy dance; a generation ago, we liked it because we thought the dance was graceful. We used to tell our kids to be modest because Indian film stars were modest. Now, what can I tell them, they behave in the same way as Americans". I point out that one of the movies she appreciates for retaining its 'Indianness' in the face of modernity is actually a copy of *Stepmom*, from Hollywood. "Yes", she says, "but at least it's still about the family".

It is not hard to join the dots from the discourse about the Westernisation of cinema to the 'over-modernisation' of India, to its corruption and its sacrifice of 'culture' at the expense of its 'essence'. It is true that urban India, especially for the middle classes, has changed tremendously. Consumption pervades daily life as perhaps never before, and increasing access to global commodities has meant a shift in the understanding of what is understood as 'Indian'. While there is no consensus on this in India itself, it is the diaspora that perhaps finds it more difficult to resolve this confusion. In South Africa, as this nostalgia for an idealised past grows, it at the outset seems imagined – what India is spoken of when few have actually lived there or seen how it has changed? Films have been a powerful vehicle for the transmission of the imagined nation, such that even its on-screen changes are experienced as real. Other sources of information only serve to compound these views. Images of wealthy Indians appropriating the West are plenty, as are stories of India's 'economic miracle' and its imminent status as a 'superpower'.

A younger brand of filmmakers have responded to this conundrum of relating to the new South Africa by making films about contemporary South African Indians' lives, mostly of modest production quality, made on fairly low budgets. Some of these films speak of 'family' themes, which are, of course, popular in Indian cinema. Many of the prohibitions of Indian cinema seem unconsciously reproduced, such as a ban on kissing and on skimpy clothes for female characters (unless they are to be portrayed in a negative light). As in popular Indian cinema, the families are mostly Hindu. Even Ali, who is a Muslim from Pakistan who makes films in Durban, portrays distinctively Hindu families in his films. But interestingly, they also depart significantly from cinematic themes in Indian films, and almost every filmmaker I met in Durban was emphatic about wanting to carve out a space that was not competing with Indian cinema, but spoke of a different world altogether. There is hardly a consensus about what this world is, and what the right way to represent it could be. The genres range from family dramas and romantic comedies, to a werewolf spoof that has done surprisingly well. Masood, who made *Attack of the Indian Werewolf*, finds that transgressing the boundaries of the romance/family orientation that 'works' with Indian audiences, was not easy, however popular the film. "People do complain that it's vulgar. My mother didn't speak to me for a week after she watched it. If people see that in a Hollywood movie, they don't complain. They accept Hollywood as an immoral machine, but they can't accept it in their own people".

Much as Indian cinema has portrayed a conflict between what it means to be modern and Indian, between West and East, Durban Indian films negotiate what it means to be 'Indian' in a South African context. The new Indian cinema is more liberal with the notion of Indian identity, in particular youth identity. This seems to resonate with South African Indian youth, who display a renewed interest in it and more so in its music. They are in a better position now than during apartheid to identify with the wider Indian diaspora.

Nonetheless, the young, perhaps more than the old, are also aware of their position in the South African project. They are not mere immigrants in the new South Africa, but are part of the discourse about the diversity of the rainbow nation. The films make their South African context clear, as did Raeesa, perhaps the only Durban Indian woman filmmaker at present, when she said, "I could have worked in Bollywood, I had friends there. But that's not me. I wanted to be part of a South African Indian film". Some of the films feature non-Indian characters as well, sometimes in minor roles, and in other instances as major characters. Some have even made the foray into dealing with inter-racial relationships, still a fairly rare occurrence and a taboo subject.

Audiences are not, of course, universally accepting of local Durban Indian films; many complain of their being too over-the-top, with sub-standard acting and camerawork or shaky plotlines. Many video store owners will cynically remark that the only charm about local films is that they are local. But perhaps this is more than just a disparaging assessment of movie texts. Naresh, another filmmaker from Durban, says people are merely 'tolerating' these films until something 'better' comes along. This expression itself suggests that these films, even if not in their current form, occupy a certain space in South African Indian popular culture. But even as an older generation struggles to identify with an increasingly unrecognisable homeland, a younger generation is, with equal unease, attempting to forge acceptance in the new South Africa. ■

Notes

- 1 *Despite the substantial presence of an Indian community in South Africa, there is surprisingly little work about Indian cinema in the country. Exceptions include Haseenah Ebrahim and Thomas Blom Hansen. See Haseenah Ebrahim, "From Ghetto to Mainstream: Bollywood in South Africa", in **Scrutiny**2 13(2), pp. 63-76 (2008) and Thomas Blom Hansen, "In Search of the Diasporic Self: Bollywood in South Africa", in (eds.) Raminder Kaur and*

- Ajay Sinha, **Bollyworld: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens** (Sage Publications, 2005, New Delhi). For a broader reading into popular culture among South African Indians, see also Thomas Blom Hansen, "Melancholia of Freedom: Humour and Nostalgia among Indians in South Africa", in **Modern Drama** 48(2) (Summer 2005).
- 2 Scholars have charted the itinerary of Indian cinema to many (seemingly unlikely) parts of the world with substantially fewer Indians among their midst than South Africa. Dina Iordanova traces the popularity of the film *Aawara* in the 1950s across Egypt, Turkey, Senegal, Yugoslavia and her own Bulgaria. Laura Fair documents the case of *Aawara* in Zanzibar in the 1950s, and how it contributed to the construction of romance. Adeline Masquelier recounts similarly that in Niger in the 1990s, before the arrival and subsequent popularity of Mexican soap operas, it was Indian videos that the youth turned to for a romantic education. Similar work has been done by Brian Larkin among the Hausa in Nigeria. See Dina Iordanova, "Indian Cinema's Global Reach: Historiography Through Testimonies", in **South Asian Popular Culture** 4(2), pp. 113–40 (October 2006); Adeline Masquelier, "Lessons from Rubi: Love, Poverty, and the Educational Value of Televised Dramas in Niger", in (eds.) Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas, **Love in Africa** (University of Chicago Press, 2009, Chicago); Brian Larkin, "Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel Modernities", in (eds.) Jonathan X. Inda and Renato Rosaldo, **The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader** (Blackwell Publishers, 2002, Malden, MA); and Brian Larkin, "Itineraries of Indian Cinema: African Videos, Bollywood, and Global Media", in (eds.) Jonathan X. Inda and Renato Rosaldo, **The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader (Second Edition)** (Blackwell Publishers, 2008, Malden, Mass.).
 - 3 Larkin (2002), Larkin (2008), *ibid.*
 - 4 Larkin (2002), *ibid.*
 - 5 This was also partly due to the fact that Mehboob, a newspaper columnist in Cape Town, problematised the notion of the crossover audience for me. We never speak of 'crossover' audiences for American or Italian films, their universality is presumed. Why then do we use this notion when we speak of Indian cinema? Nonetheless, I think it is also important to recognise that watching Indian cinema does have different meanings for diaspora and non-diaspora audiences, a fact that Larkin has also pointed out. See Larkin (2008), *op. cit.*
 - 6 The term 'Indians' is used in South Africa to describe all those of Indian descent, even though many may be fifth or sixth generation immigrants, and may no longer even know which part of India they are from.
 - 7 Cultural currents that circumvent the West altogether are often neglected or overlooked. The story of Indian cinema fits into this narrative; although there is more interest in its presence in the West, it has had a significant presence in many other parts of the world, including Africa, for several decades. But diasporas in Europe (particularly the UK) or the US seem to become more obvious choices as a focus of study.
 - 8 Hansen (2005), "In Search of the Diasporic Self", *op. cit.*, p. 258.
 - 9 Arjun Appadurai. **Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization** (University of Minnesota Press, 1996, Minneapolis, London), p. 3.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
 - 11 Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff. "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming". In **Public Culture** 12 (2), pp. 291–343 (2000).
 - 12 *Ibid.*, p. 305.
 - 13 While academic discourse notes clearly the difference between 'Indian cinema' and its much more specific, modern and consumption-oriented subset 'Bollywood', in South Africa, as perhaps elsewhere outside academic circles, these terms are used interchangeably.

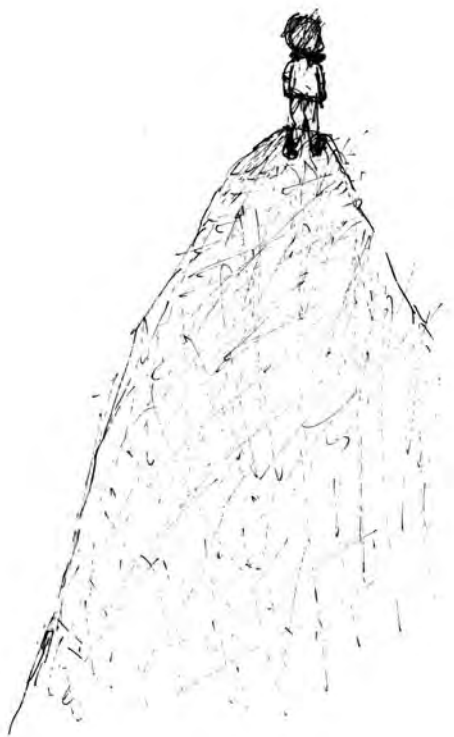








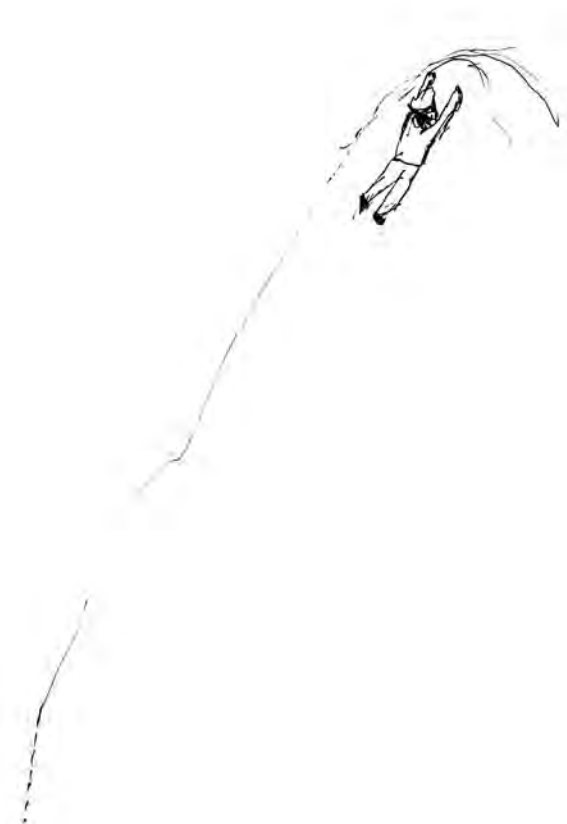












DRAWING AS A MENTAL EXERCISE
Gagandeep Singh



GURGAON UTOPIA

Anisa Rahim



One

Gurgaon bears personal significance because my mother grew up in Gurgaon in a family home, affectionately known as the *kothi*, constructed before Partition in Sadar Bazaar. The *kothi* is on the top floor of a four-story structure connected by a long hallway where one can look down to the remaining floors, which include tailoring, footwear and fabric shops, an office-space for a cement factory and a Bengali sweets shop. Because of the household's unspoken gender segregation, there was limited movement between the bedrooms, the kitchen and the small balcony overlooking a vegetable market, but the expansive roof provided ample aerial views of Sadar Bazaar or what I like to now think of as 'old' Gurgaon.





**Two**

As my conception of Gurgaon expanded beyond this interior space, Gurgaon too rapidly changed from a village to an industrial hub and a major urban centre. Nowadays, people rarely think of Sadar Bazaar when they speak of Gurgaon. Instead Gurgaon is known for its multiplexes, malls, call centres, and glossy factories. But behind the sheen of new construction, there has been the influx of so many migrant workers with countless thousands of people going to work every day in what is an ordinary affair, but one bearing greater resemblance to a procession.







Three

Gurgaon keeps expanding, foreshadowing the changing landscape of Haryana. The last set of images was taken at IMT-Manesar at the Maruti Suzuki complex, during the 2011 workers' struggle. The eerie amount of open space, the factories' attempts to erect boundaries and isolate ordinary people is met with new forms of resistance and collectivities.





RUIN

Atreyee Majumder

A vast wiremesh of narrow alleys plugs into feeder roads which pour into highways, bridges and railway stations. Heavy carriers loaded with spare parts of automobiles, jute, readymade garments and other ancillary components for make-believe worlds somewhere else attack my line of view on these roads. The reaction is a nauseous arrangement of emotional and physical life that I report back to my university as 'fieldwork'. It is, in a sense, a story of a river. It attracted vessel and managing agent and engineer and sailor and labour to its riparian surround.¹ These lands offered shores and riverfronts for those that were looking to dock ships and repair them. And inland water transport for goods to be freighted towards bigger ships waiting at the Hooghly Sandhead, further down into the Bay. Lands for quick conversion of crop to agro-product to feed an anxious and hungry war machine. A pontoon bridge turned into a metallic one. A Grand Trunk Road showed a shrunken, nauseous escape out of this wiremesh. Oil seed turned into oil, flax to jute, ore to usable metal, manhole-covers, nuts and bolts for machinery to be strung together. A wave of time swept on this shore once, a nation-state was born. With it, a struggling regional state. And some of its political luminosity was lent to this landscape. Furnaces burnt, layered in soot, for they had only ever known to burn. Ideology and opportunity washed against the river-bed time and time again to give birth to an angry land. A landmass once intoxicated by the wideness lent by proximity to a passing stranger struggles today, constructing repeatedly the sensation of the wideness and associated glory of the stranger's canvas on its tattered historical notepad.

The typical site of industrial defeat, uncoordinated urban effort and related sadness, Howrah is gripped at its crossroads in historical cross-connection. Young boys move around the neighbourhood of Kadamtala with an iron rod and magnet, collecting scrap iron lining the sides of the narrow alley, Mrs Mukherjee narrates. A world that is trying to disentangle itself out of a historical wiremesh gets more and more bound, even as a now-time is watched floating beyond the river. A widespace – globe/nation/region – and a now-time are embraced and distanced across the river. A colonial collision is remembered on this landscape of decadent manufacture with proud sadness. The ruins of such collision with colonially dispensed industrial energy and resultant urbanisms are today crucial nodes through which emotional and intellectual signals are emitted at an ever-out-of-reach, faster, wider world across the river. This piece is a walk through such nodes, and an attempt to pick up some signals.²

1. Riverfront

1.1. A half-peddalling bicycle comes along. And a toothy grin with it. What's all the stuff in your bag? It looks really heavy. Why – you want to carry it? I would, but then my cycle... A minute-long dream-run when time is slowed down to an almost-stop. The daily trickle of men, material and transport rues in September heat the precariousness of half-pedal love. Blue pyjamas and white kurta, braids and beads of sweat. Blockbuster songs of not-so-known movies blare on the loudspeaker. It is the hang-over day after Visvakarma Puja.

1.2. The Grand Trunk Road claws, at the rhythm of defeat, through the Shibpur Bazar, and many temples and jute mill relics pour out into the Howrah Maidan crossroad and onto the Howrah Bridge. The uncomfortable bus ride on it is hardly reminiscent of Sher Shah Suri's majesty. The ambition and distinction of its residents and peddlers are conveyed to the Grand Trunk Road on sign boards proclaiming LIC Agent, Desi Doktor Dawakhana, Muslim Marriage Registrar, discounts, sales, makeovers. The Howrah Maidan is a crossroad of many busy

streets pouring their buses and pedestrians out – a chaotic coil of nerve-endings pouring men and goods out at the mouth of the Howrah bridge. The Kadamtala Dasnagar stretch is generously speckled with foundries, cast-iron workshops, recycling units for iron shavings. Three-wheelers ply these roads with heaps of iron shavings. They look like deep-fried noodles. Foundries groan through the day as ore and limestone cook in the Cupola furnace. Molten iron, solidified in burrow-like depressions, emerges proud and hopeful.

Garbage flows along routes of its own, carving new enclaves of desire and disgust. Youth pass by carelessly. Deities look on forlorn. Women cover their faces with saris. Men square their shoulders. I shut my eyes. Narrow alleys housing small blast furnaces, sooted sinewy youth, Bhojpuri movie theatres, locked factories, broken windows, handcarts, wheelbarrows, trucks, buses, swearwords pass by. G.T. Road (North) turns into G.T. Road (South). Warehouses and mills turn into shopkeepers and schoolgirls. They jostle for stench-free air. Goats are chopped into biriyani. Blood turned into curry. A flyover bridge has a twofold role – carrier of speed and expectation on top, protector and provider against rain, dirt and extinction below. The rains come down in merciless mirth. Tugging at doors and saris. Insolently breaking down boundary walls of clean and dirty.

1.3. You weave dreamworlds and catastrophe³ out of big-city rejects. Reject cell phones, footwear, football jerseys, tie-up bras, sunglasses, CDs. Counterfeit doesn't quite catch it. A mofussil version of commodity, this. A creature of limited resource, fantastic urge and images floating your way across the evening river. These commodities adorn adolescent breasts filled with hopeful sexuality. The morning athlete carries around a leaping jaguar on his thighs. Cell phones are repaired with new batteries and new keypads. Carefully blanketed in plastic covers. Maruti vans are repainted. With a message for Champa at the back. Champa wears a shiny butterfly on the butt of her jeans. She smiles coyly and expects you to get the message. If you don't, she conveys her indignation in SMS short form in the dead of night. You would not want her to wait too long at the bus stop next to the B-grade movie hall. Next to a blown-up photo of big breasts and an angry man. Probably called *Suneehri Raat*. Or something in Bhojpuri. It would ruin your nightly fantasy if she stood there too long. Her innocence corrupted in the evil company of murky sexuality. But you'd like her to waver in the dark alley sometimes. Retaining guilt and shame, of course. Or else your nightly fantasy would be ruined. It's the only thing, this nightly fantasy. It keeps you going as you hang out of the trekker, jump across heaps of garbage, brave the kicks in your gut, fall asleep in your sweaty armpit, expect the next dot to appear soon after you join the first two.

1.4. The stripped walls of Andul Rajbari appear a short rickshaw-ride after the Andul bus stand. Majestic pillars tell a story of decay, as a sign board for Andul Sporting Club peeps from behind. Coke, chips and cigarettes, saris and dress material are sold under one of its great pillars. Next to the sporting club. I walk in through one of its tall broken doors. And pigeons trapeze through the quadrangular courtyard inside. Long stretches of corridor look down upon me. My feet kick at many piles of ruin, and unwittingly upset an inner equilibrium of decay. Nostalgia meets nonchalance here. At one of the corners, the petticoats of an occupant are hung out to dry. Babu Bagchi was shot in front of the Botanical Garden gate in broad daylight. He died bending over, trying to save his infant child in his arms. The story goes, Bagchi, an old hand in the mafia-party nexus, was beginning to switch colour and loyalty. The dead river Saraswati is remembered to have flowed through the Batore area in the city, around which it joins with the Kona Expressway today. It is here, historian Mohanlal tells me, that the ancestor of the *zamindari* family of Kundu Choudhury came in the course of commercial travel and thought it would be nice to strike roots by the Saraswati. It was here that they established

their *zamindari* through the salt trade. The various zamindari families brought with them the instruments of refinement and culture, I am told, as this used to be primarily the preserve of the *dule-bagdi*, the lower castes who did not read and write. The schools, hospitals and libraries of the region date back to such stories of 19th century philanthropy. The demography changed with the influx of Muslim populations after the Bangladesh war of 1971. Many work in readymade garments today from their houses – a house having about 10 sewing machines.

1.5. The Shalimar station hosts the resting machine. Its well-painted wellbeing is testimony to its distance from the feverish world of train-citizenship. Trains usually speed by, leaving remnant economies of *chai*, *moongphali*, urine, family-unions. Not here, where men put their feet up on the seat, unbutton their shirts. A masculine leisure is mirrored between a stretched-out train and a stretched-out man. This is where feverish pace comes to a halt. The world is kept at a distance as one recuperates for the next round. Warehouses and godowns stand guard for cargo and the resting men. Sacks are thrown one on top of the other. Some slip aside for a quick passage into the grey zone. Its shining, whitewashed, blue-lined walls are awkward. As if they were all-gearred for a green signal, and it never came. Women hunch on the benches of the platform. Without a hint of hurry-anxiety in their eyes. This could be a park. Or their inner courtyard.

1.6. Wooden chests of drawers, bare tables and chairs, fans hanging from a high ceiling in the inner premises of Hooghly Docks speak of a once-busy time. A faint conversation continues with the early 19th century. The Hooghly Dock and Port Engineers Limited (HDPEL), established in 1819. The region on the riverfront of Howrah and Hooghly was to industrialise rapidly after the construction of the Calcutta Port and the installation of railways in the latter half of the 19th century. Locked steel cabinets are labelled 'Obsolete Documents'. Taken over by the central government in 1984, in order to address the needs of financial and infrastructural management, the HDPEL campus stands on the riverfront of Salkia – a ghosthouse. Its salaries are paid by the government, it has no orders. *Aapni likhe deben eta kebol dhonshaboshesh*. Please go and write that this is nothing but ruin.

1.7. A house of two storeys introduces itself as 4, Nityadhan Mukherjee Road – in other words, a ruin. This is the place from where Sibnath Banerjee ran the Socialist Party office and later the Hind Mazdoor Sabha. Its bricks had become exposed as the building had been shorn of its outer coating of paint/concrete. Some leaves had grown out of its crevices. The room is lined with imperious book cabinets which, I guessed, housed moth-eaten documents of the history of unionism in Early Independent India. Most were likely being eaten by silverfish even as this thought occurs to me. This building used to house the Sibnath Banerjee Institute of Labour. The building was owned by Aghorenath Chattopadhyay, who was a Congress enthusiast, spills Nirmal Ghosal after some pestering. Novelist Saratchandra Chatterjee was a tenant in this house at some point, the story goes. The District Congress office used also to operate out of this building once, I am told. On a stormy evening in the middle of our interviews, Ghosal points out to me the thriving banyan that has spread its roots into the deep interstices of this building. Its heritage status had recently been affirmed by the Heritage Commission, which was a relief for him as now its Marwari businessman owner could no longer go ahead with his plans of converting it into a shopping complex. But the court had not come to a solution as to who might be the legitimate bearer of the responsibility to finance its restoration. The building was threatened; that did not stop Ghosal and his associates from putting their legs up on the tables and discussing the moribund state of labour politics and the wider fold of decline and decay that the nation found itself in, over cups of sugary *chai* across muggy evenings.



2. Moving Publics

2.1. On the eve of the CPI(M)-sponsored strike of 28 February 2012, I turn into an alley on the right, at Howrah Maidan. Into a crowd hurrying to wrap up business and pack their destroyables off to the road before the halt of tomorrow. Wiry men load gunny bags of *maal* on cycle vans and take them to be loaded onto the trucks waiting by the riverside. A desperate attempt to minimise losses before dawn. The push of gunny bags takes me forward to the huge and highly-walled factory of Burn Standard Company. The machines in this railway-wagon manufacturing yard are still groaning from evening activity. Work is afoot even as workers trickle out on their bicycles. The West Bengal Police waits at these gates too. Burn was one of the feathers in the Trinamool cap in the run-up to the elections of 2011, as Mamata Banerjee injected new resources for its revival from sick status when she was Minister of State for Railways. Behind Burn, on the riverwalkway, it is pitch dark. Mamata's men were determined to keep things moving to negate the strike called by their opponents, and the opponents were all out to exact some flesh the next day. Commerce had to be protected in the mouth of imminent collision between competing sovereigns.

2.2. As we walk along the riverside strip of ship-repair yards and workshops of automobile spare parts, away from the Botanical Garden, Darikanath tells me stories of operators who did not have licenses, and would give him gifts and feed him good food. He usually did not take money, but only material things like rope. Why would I lie about this, he asks aloud. Can't pretend I am a saint. Once a manager gave him an amount for each unit produced without compliance to the standard. He took the money because his daughter's wedding was coming up at the time. As we walk the riverside ship-repair stretch, he mentions big ships he has seen while travelling from London to Italy. He rues the numerous times that people have belittled the level of his knowledge. He spoke to someone once about the exact date that the Howrah Municipal Corporation started, and the man said, "Why should I care?"

2.3. At Kolatola, an important crossroad on the Amta route, I wait for the Amta-Munshirhaat trekker, should it care to stop. It is the easiest route to get to Maju, where I am visiting the Ghosals. The trekkers are always packed on this route, and if you miss one, you end up waiting a long wait until the next arrives. Having learnt that lesson early, I decide to eat my fears and jump on as a foot-soldier, clinging on to the steel frames that encase the back-entrance. School-goers and mothers join my ranks. Some sit on top, which seems safer to me, in a situation where all the inside seating is exhausted. But the top is a male bastion, I'm told; no question of a woman sitting there. The ticket-man laughs at me for suggesting that I might, and says the man who marries me will not have to worry. He asks if I am travelling for work, and I nod, concentrating all the while on maintaining a strong grip on my steel rod, not letting it slip as the vehicle soldiers on through road-craters. We turn from one urban cluster into countryside en route to another urban cluster – Munshirhaat. Produce, cattle, familial expectation, marital alliance, civilisational content are ferried on this corridor, of which the rural space is on occasion participant, on occasion bystander.

2.4. The Burmese-style house of the 19th century Bengali novelist Sarat Chandra Chatterjee in Panitrash, Bagnan, stands hidden from the fast corridor of Bombay Road, on the banks of the Rupnarayan river. On a winter afternoon of Sarat mela, picnic parties throng the banks. The riverfront is laden with loudspeakers, discarded bottles and paper plates at sunset. Heritage is ambivalently embraced in the frenzied abandon of the city trip to the riverside on the fast roadscape of National Highway 6.



3. The Dreaming Collective

3.1. Iron work requires skill and artistry that must be learnt and practiced with ardour. Loha (iron) is a matter of affinity; it is not just an avenue of livelihood. For turners' jobs, he prefers workers from Ranchi – patient artisans, loyal to their employers (*babubhokto*).

3.2. Their union was set up two years ago, says Habib. Which matches the timeline of the Trinamool Congress' power in the state. The mill produces about 100 tonnes a day. It works in three shifts – Shift A (6-11 a.m., break, 2-5 p.m.), Shift B (11 a.m.-2 p.m., break, 5-10 p.m.), Night Shift (10 p.m. to 6 a.m.). No one is strictly permanent here. The way it works in jute mills is that if there is work, you get paid. Most people are of *bodli* status – which means that they come to work, and if there is work, they work, or else they go home or find other means of making a wage.

3.3. Howrah speaks in, and of, ruin. Ruin feverishly pumped for the last sparks of light and energy. Sanskrit pamphlet, hundred-year-old reading room, dog-eared manuscripts, derelict factory units, shiny new Vivekananda statue – all speak of a fraught conversation with the 'now' chapter of time. The 'becoming' and 'disappearing' acts on the stage of time play out in the historical consciousness performed by Howrah publics. These public figures appear on public scenes, fingering through heaps of rubble in thorough disbelief that the focal light has shifted. This dreaming collective embraces its ruinous treasures in an attempt to ameliorate the wounds of being violently thrown out of the flow of now-time. Their speeches of desire and disgust for the new Avani mall installed on the industrial riverfront of Foreshore Road, a stone's throw from the Kajipara crossroad, resound through the craggy walls of the Rajbari and the tragic sheds of jute mills and dockyards. In such public scenes, they seek comfort from their friends from distant times – altruistic *zamindars*, gallant Forward Bloc leaders, empathetic colonists (Job Charnock is fondly remembered for having docked at Uluberia in 1687 and recommending its merits to the East India Company as a potential capital) in narrating current tragedies. Young people have taken to the cell phone – and hence neglect their responsibility towards libraries, sports clubs, temples and manuscripts. The corruption of the hyper-modern advertisement, Hindi song and commercial entertainment is decried – in the backdrop of the fact that most current Hindi films do not play in Howrah theatres. A golden statue of Swami Vivekananda is installed at the Kajipara crossroad at the mouth of the runway to the second Hooghly Bridge. Swami Vivekananda faces the Avani Mall a few blocks away, in fortitude and disdain towards this threatening irritant. It is yet a gaze of desire. Both loci of a wider world of heightened pace and widened scale poke a finger into this circle of limitedness, with a knowing perception of each other's motives.

The Howrah crossroad – of urgent endorsement of parallel technologies and riverside-utopias and anxious sacralisation of ruined objects, be they palace, factory or manuscript – unfolds a Benjaminian 'temporal nucleus': actors and interests of history are reduced in scale and intensity, and injected into a contraption that continuously generates a politically legible and motion-driven story of how we came to be this way. 'Origin', as Benjamin understood it, is that which emerges in the 'process of becoming and disappearing'. It is this constant process of becoming and disappearing that I refer to as the making of 'now'-time. In between the kaleidoscopic becoming and disappearing, Howrah publics struggle to arrest time for themselves on the historical mainstage.

3.4. Benjamin's 'historical object' remains a solidified heap of ruin – necessary constituents of the present. This debris has a constitutive and not a causal relationship with the 'present'.

For Benjamin, the turgid ‘temporal nucleus’ that constitutes the ‘present’ is necessarily made of debris from the past, and is thereby a re-arrangement of debris in the making of the spectacularly ‘new’ (see especially Buck-Morss 1989:218-220).⁴ In such an argument, Benjamin sees bourgeoisie and proletariat united in the affliction of dreamlikeness – experiencing time as a dream – in the intoxication of mass cultures of industrial capitalism, a dreaming reverie that makes existence possible through the trauma of industrialisation and industrialism. In this, industrialism provides its own antidote. He particularly uses the motif of film, where particles of time are drawn out for closer reflection for the dreaming viewer to keep walking the track carved for him by capital.

A Howrah temporality is framed in these summonings. Heroes return to shoulder some of the burden and ignominy of these times. Surrounded by installations of ‘frozen time’, the publics of Howrah take the stance of combating and affirming the logics of history in the same move. This dreamlike arrangement of this landscape rivets its publics to its indeterminate historical place. History, handed down in tales of the colonist and the nationalist and the local hero, is held on to as a crystal ball even as history’s speed escapes their fingers every moment. Missed opportunities and tragic decline are framed in the canvas of the longview of time⁵ and the wideview of space. Time emerges in the fraught habitation of the physical debris of an earlier era of modernist urgency, stationed on the edges of a railway station, a bridge and a metropolis that promise quick flights into the zones of urgency of today. The framing of current time in a canvas of longtime occurs in the rhythm of becoming and disappearing on this landscape. As the landscape, laden with debris, rearranges itself, making room for the new mall on Foreshore Road, the port watches – silted and inactive. Libraries stand around in the firm embrace of brittle manuscripts, waiting for the faraway reader to come along. ■

Notes

- 1 ‘Surround’ as a noun is a word I steal from Ananya Vajpeyi’s **Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India** (2012).
- 2 In weaving this piece of writing, I rely on Benjamin’s work in form and content. In a sense, I try to copy him. I rely heavily on philosopher Susan Buck-Morss’ commentary on Benjamin. **The Arcades Project**, which he worked on for 13 years and left unfinished in 1940 when he committed suicide, is a puzzling ensemble of text. Benjamin, Buck-Morss reminds us, was writing as a philosopher and not a literary/aesthetic theorist. It was his specific methodological affinity towards showing philosophy in a visually perceptible form that made many of his writings take the shape they did.
- 3 I use this often, stolen, of course, from Susan Buck-Morss’ **Dreamworld and Catastrophe** (2000).
- 4 In writing about Benjamin’s ‘historical object’ and the constant battling of ‘becoming’ and ‘disappearing’, I wish to disaggregate two threads of time in Benjamin’s work – those of onward flowing “empty, homogeneous time” into which the material of history fills up, and the one that is a small whirlwind which contains the sensational experience of ‘now-time’. The latter is necessarily entangled in the former. This vortex of now-time is spatially depicted. The inevitable after-history of such urgent whirlwinds of now-time is their reduction to residue – their addition into an existing historical pile of residue – debris, if one wishes, that continues to witness new spectacles. A spiral of urgent, contemporary spectacles constitute our sense of the ‘present’ – in politics, aesthetics, technology, science and so on – each rapidly returning to the ash-like heap of residue. Even as we are able to recognise the present in a sudden flash of arclights on an intersection of time and space, voice and image, life and corpse, through ingredients which we know to recognise because of their pre-existing membership in our history.

Buck-Morss (1989) writes about Benjamin’s historian hat: “...he called historicism the greatest narcotic of the time – but for the shock of historical citations ripped out of their original context with

a 'strong seemingly brutal grasp', and brought into the most immediate present. This method created 'dialectical images', in which the old-fashioned undesirable suddenly appeared current, or the new desired appeared as a repetition of the same". Benjamin's insistence on a spatial reading of history emerges from this dialectical view of the present that he provides in **The Arcades Project** and other city-writings – the present as a hellishly cyclical, repetition of nothing-new, an amalgam of historical residue formed out of debris from various fleeting spectacles from distant eras of history.

- 5 The longview of time has found treatment in Vajpeyi's (2012) work, especially on Tagore's view of nation's time in an insurmountable abyss – viraha – as the poet sees through the lens of Kalidasa's yaksha in Meghduta. Needless to reiterate that South Asian historiography has grappled for decades with the question of colonially calibrated time of capital, struggles with which are apparent in moments from subaltern registers. See especially, Chatterjee (1993) on 'heterogenous time', Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) on History I and II, and Manu Goswami (2004) on 'spatiotemporal scales'. ■

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THE LOGICS AND REALMS OF SMALL TOWN TERRITORIES

THE STORY OF TIRUCHENGODE

Bhuvaneswari Raman

Urban studies view city territories in general and small town ones in particular as projections of either the master plan or the market; territories that do not fit these logics are read through the lens of informality and illegality. Such readings eventually pose urban territories as problems to be fixed through better plans and strict implementation. Small towns are further assumed to be inward-looking enclaves of locally bound economy and politics, their growth shaped by metro city market logic.

This reasoning has influenced recent rhetoric of making city plans transparent, and has catalysed the production of digital plans and databases. By contrast, this essay, through its focus on a small town – Tiruchengode in western Tamil Nadu – shows that territory is an assemblage of multiple forces and fields, irreducible to the singular logic of master plans and metro dynamics (Benjamin, 2008, 2012). Further, it shows the incompleteness of the information on which urban projections are developed – not owing to issues of data collection or management, but because of the difficulty of capturing urban territorial dynamism. This paper points to the importance of reading cities from the ground, rather than fixing them within linear projections.

The essay has two sections. The first traces the variety of forces and fields that shaped Tiruchengode through mapping settlement histories and claiming practices in a social context whose fluid politics in place and time make predicting the trajectory of territoriality difficult.¹ The second section engages with the nature of the information underpinning urban planning, and discusses projections of the transparent city and their demand for incessant information production.²

I

Practices of Territoriality:**Property among the Early Settlers**

Tiruchengode's history can be traced back to the 7th century CE.³ The Ardhanareswarar temple that is its landmark is of even greater antiquity, finding mention in the 3rd century Tamil epic, *Silappathigaram*. Local oral histories suggest that the town's first settlers were predominantly from the Senguntha Mudaliar weaver caste, said to have arrived here after their previous locality – a historic urban settlement called Morur – was destroyed by fire. Other caste groups – Gounders, Vanniyars and various Scheduled Castes⁴ – joined them over time. Descendants of 70 of the town's first households reside here still; only 100 of the community's *gothras*, clans, are recognised as native to Tiruchengode, as per the Mudaliar caste association, the *pavadi panchayat*, which keeps the community's records.

The term *pavadi* (from the word *paavu*, meaning warp) denotes the open space where warps are stretched for drying, and indicates how weaving, the artisan merchant Mudaliars' chief occupation, shaped their lives, territory and property. The Mudaliar locality can be distinguished by its architecture – low, white walls, narrow lanes and closely constructed housing units. While each household would maintain one or two looms at home, the warping and starching of thread was done in the *pavadi* common space. Each *paavu* requires a 20 x 200 sq ft space; *pavadis* could accommodate from 20 to 60 such.

Until recently, the exchange of individually held work/living units in the Mudaliar quarter was largely effected within the community, although investments in Mudaliar settlements by other castes in textile production, particularly the Gounders, also occurred.⁵ Today, with many Mudaliars shifting to power looms or moving to other professions, changes in land use have also come about. Of the three *pavadis* Tiruchengode once had, one was allotted via the state to a small economic cluster and is no longer exclusive to the Mudaliars. The

others are still under the joint control of the *pavadi* council and a Mudaliar sub-group. Part of one has been leased to the municipality for a weekly market, a community centre has been constructed on another part. The other *pavadi* remains undeveloped and is used for community festivals.

Since 2000, *pavadi* land has been much sought after by developers prospecting for real estate opportunities. Besides the town *pavadis*, there are one or two in each surrounding village, wherever Mudaliars are settled. Some have been sold, and residential layouts raised in their place. The recent climb in real estate prices has eroded, though not erased, Mudaliar control over their territory, both urban and rural.

Supra-Local Caste Organisations and Territorial Claims

Perceptions about the claims and practices of property, economy and politics are influenced by Tiruchengode's being embedded in supra-local organisation, far pre-dating the administrative systems of modern India. The *Naadu* system is significant here, with its network of caste-exclusive organisations formed to address their members' concerns across towns and villages. Tiruchengode's two dominant castes, the Mudaliars and the Gounders, for example, each have their distinctive *Naadus*, the *Ezhukarai Naadu* and the *Kongu Naadu* respectively. While there are territorial overlaps, the two are distinct in their administration and supra-locality linkages (Mines 1984; Beck 1972).

The *Ezhukarai Naadu* is a hierarchy of the caste councils of seven towns, each town including seven villages. Formed to facilitate and safeguard the Mudaliars' international trade interests, with links extending as far east as China and, in the west, to Greece and Rome,⁶ the *Ezhukarai Naadu* also maintained armies for protecting textile centres (Mines 1984). It is headquartered today at the Tiruchengode *pavadi* council, which therefore occupies a high position in the inter-locality hierarchy. Until recently, the *Ezhukarai Naadu* adjudicated disputes between Mudaliar households; some

councils have now restricted themselves solely to non-property related, intra-familial disputes and the promotion of caste interests.

The Gounders' *Naadu* system, parallel to that of the Mudaliars, is constituted of 24 *Naadus*. The Gounders arrived in Tiruchengode at a fairly late stage. They owned agricultural land and settled in 82 villages around the town; they still straddle both town and rural hinterland, thus rendering the *Kongu Naadu's* boundary fluid. The Gounders first moved to Tiruchengode as financiers for home-based textile looms and the mill economy; today they control several economic activities including finance, power looms, lorry re-engineering and oil rig assembly units. While *pavadi* councils administer Mudaliar caste issues across localities, *Kongu Naadu* records are maintained by a single priest who also has knowledge of the clans' properties. (The Gounder priests deem themselves to be above brahmins on the caste hierarchy.) The *Kongu Naadu* council manages individual Gounder property disputes and locality-specific issues.

The Ardhanareeswarar temple forms the focal point for mobilising the caste communities across the *Naadu* territories. Although it is the headquarters for the *Ezhukarai Naadu*, it does not belong to any one caste. It is claimed/controlled by all communities. Their collective participation in its affairs, and foremost in its 14-day annual festival, has an important materiality as it influences perceptions of claims to the town's territory and its economic and political spaces. Although the temple administration was transferred to the state after Independence, elections to its board are the arena where politics to control the town play out.

Both the *Kongu Naadu* and the *Ezhukarai Naadu* connect localities where their respective caste members have settled. These organisations are relevant today as they provide a platform for mobilising the respective castes for negotiations with the state. In the context of Tiruchengode, these networks have facilitated land transactions with outsiders and the flow of investments into the town.

Colonial Politics and Territoriality

The development of Tiruchengode's modern-day economic clusters was catalysed during colonial times. A key infrastructural investment was a roughly 48-km transport corridor connecting Tiruchengode with both Namakkal (today the district headquarters, less than 40 km away) and the train station of another neighbouring town, Sangagiri. The opening of the Namakkal-Tiruchengode-Sangagiri highway led to the consolidation of territory by the town's Mudaliars, influential members of whom are said to have captured 50 ft on either side of the road, according to members of the *pavadi panchayat*. This, in the 20th century, catalysed the evolution of Tiruchengode's lorry re-engineering services.⁷ Over the years, Mudaliar properties were sold to Gounders, who set up lorry repair workshops; migrants from the Kollar Asari⁸ craftsman caste also moved in to set up workshops along the main road.

During the Second World War, the British commissioned the flag printing and the production of soldiers' uniforms in India. Contracts for both were secured by Mudaliars. Their textile looms in Tiruchengode expanded; the community also diversified into the rice trade and into printing, clusters for which developed on open land bordering the *pavadi* to one side and the main temple road on the other. These developments attracted Marvari financiers from Calcutta, who settled in the neighbouring town of Erode and funded looms.⁹

Tiruchengode was also a locus of the Independence movement. It was the birthplace of C. Rajagopalachariar and of Dr P. Subbarayan, both freedom fighters and members of the Indian National Congress. A Gandhi ashram was established near the town, which served as a site for the Independence struggle. Subsequently, the regional mobilisation of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) also thrived here. These political mobilisations facilitated the coalescing of the town's caste networks with regional- and national-level political parties, connections critical for

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The mills were the centre of regional political activity in the late 60s and early 70s, particularly for the DMK, whose ascendancy in the town and the town's continuing domination in the party hierarchy are traced to this history.

bringing in investments, crafting regulation and negotiating land sale with outsiders, mediated at different geographical and political scales of government and party terrain.

Post-Independence Party Politics, Economic Expansion and Land Tenure

1. The Mill Economy

Textile mills and rice-processing entrepreneurs entered this town via caste and party political networks. The party terrain and the shared experience of the Independence struggle mediated relationships across castes, particularly between Mudaliar entrepreneurs and Gounder land owners. Land in Tiruchengode and the villages to its east was held under the *zamindari* system. The first rice-processing mill – the Raja Rice Mill – was opened in the early 1970s by an entrepreneur from Tanjore on land controlled by a *zamindar* family of the Kumaramangalam clan. Land owners here were predominantly from the Gounder or Chettiar castes. Political accommodation between the Gounder *zamindars* and the Mudaliars included selling land to Mudaliar entrepreneurs from outside Tiruchengode and granting land for low-income Mudaliar housing. The development of the mill economy catalysed the growth of residential real estate and finance businesses around the mills.

The mills were the centre of regional political activity in the late 60s and early 70s, particularly for the DMK, which came into conflict with the Congress party ruling at the Centre. An important site of their activity is the now defunct Pulikara Mill, started by Mudaliar investors from the adjoining town of Salem. The entrepreneurs also owned Modern Theatres, the film studio where former Tamil Nadu chief minister and DMK leader M. Karunanidhi started as a script writer. The mills provided a space for mobilising cadres as well as finance to fund party activities. The DMK's ascendancy in the town and the town's continuing domination in the party hierarchy are traced to this history. These histories and connections are

significant for explaining the evolution and rapid development of lorry re-engineering and rig well enterprise clusters in the town. For example, the entry of Tiruchengode entrepreneurs into the oil rig business was facilitated by a minister from this party during his tenure as chairman of the Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Sewerage Board. Further, the DMK had, in its initial years, invested in supporting small entrepreneurs as part of its strategy for breaking brahmin economic and political dominance (Subramanian 1999). Allocation of land for small economic activities and putting in place regulation favourable to their growth were part of this agenda.

2. Lorry Re-Engineering and Rig Well Assembly Clusters

As mentioned earlier, the Namakkal-Tiruchengode-Sangagiri road catalysed the evolution of small re-engineering services, attracting Kollar Asari migrants, who set up makeshift repair workshops along the highway. The second generation of these families benefitted from the expansion of the lorry transport business in the national market; some among the third generation now control the town's export-oriented borewell rig mounting business, supplying to Africa and the Gulf. Today, Tiruchengode is recognised as a specialised centre for re-engineering Ashok Leyland lorries; it is also India's preferred place for borewell rig assembly. Both enterprises attract labour to Tiruchengode from across India.

The Mudaliars and the Gounders took to these trades following the arrival of the Kollar Asari workshops. Many Gounders moved from surrounding villages to Tiruchengode to enter lorry re-engineering. Land was then held jointly by several brothers in a family, one of whom would remain in the village to farm while the others moved out to work as lorry drivers or in borewell mounting workshops, accumulate a surplus, often through chit funds, and set up small workshops: a pattern of employment followed till today.

The expansion of lorry re-engineering and borewell business units provided a fillip to real estate markets. Mudaliars took to subdividing their holdings along the

The educational economy of Tiruchengode is intermeshed with local and transnational flows of people and finance, with students enrolling from across India and also from Korea and Zimbabwe.

highway, selling them to Gounders and other castes, who have predominantly rented the land out to lorry re-engineering units or allied trades. The Gounders, seeking new arenas, would turn part of their surplus into property investment, both in Tiruchengode and in their villages – farm land nowadays is increasingly converted into plotted development, for rent or sale. This practice of circulating investment between land and economy is common to other Tiruchengode entrepreneurs. Further, the surplus from the lorry re-engineering or borewell unit is invested into land, while any agricultural surplus goes into financing textile looms, lorry businesses or setting up new borewell related units.

The flourishing of small enterprises and associated real estate in Tiruchengode can thus not be limited to an explanatory frame of either a plan or a city-driven market demand alone. A unique feature of Tiruchengode's party politics is the town's embeddedness in different geographical and temporal scales. Their negotiations for infrastructure extension are at the local, municipality level; policies related to taxation and support for small economic clusters are negotiated at the regional scale. In all these, Central, regional and local party connections and dynamics have shaped the accommodation between communities since the 70s. For example, it was a Mudaliar MLA elected on a DMK ticket who allocated one of the *pavadi* lands to the lorry re-engineering cluster. Many of these workshops were owned by Gounders. The MLA's position as president of the *pavadi* council also embedded in the lorry and textile business is key to this negotiation with the Mudaliar community and the transfer of the land to the local government – which is how one of the Mudaliars' three *pavadis* was allotted to the clusters via the municipality.

3. The Jaggery State and Vanniyar Claims to Territory

The Vanniyars are located lower down in the town's social and economic hierarchy. In recent times, they have carved for themselves a distinctive political and economic territory.

They work as labourers and small traders, and are in rental real estate. They leverage the municipal institution, particularly their connections in the lower- and middle-level bureaucracy and local party politics to negotiate their claims. The Tiruchengode Vanniyars attribute their voice in the town to the election of their caste representative as an MLA, who later served as a minister. Very often, their politics is not easily visible. My key informant is an influential leader of the community with extensive links to the bureaucracy at different levels. The derelict jaggery shop he operates from is easily written off for its appearance, but he is one of the largest land- and built-property owners in the town, and the shop is the setting for his political and economic activities, from: chit funds to real estate deals to *bhajan* clubs. The chit fund business involves a retired revenue officer, a surveyor and the village headman. The head of the Mudaliar community is a close ally, yet not close because of his caste. Within the main street, he has rented a property to the multi-national HDFC bank that fetches him a rent of more than Rs 1.5 lakhs a month. The politics of claiming territories in this town are thus fused with everyday interactions, muscle power and the spiritual component of temple and *bhajan* committees. All is not rosy here, but critical to it is the way spaces are used by different communities in a variety of colliding and overlapping forces to claim territories; much of this dynamics is invisible.

4. College Real Estate

Education-centred real estate activity has been a key factor driving the town's real estate market since the mid-90s. Many of these professional colleges, polytechnics and residential schools are located in the town's outlying areas, predominantly to the east and south. The pattern of land development along these peripheries is in stark contrast to the Western periphery, dotted by small workshop clusters.

The educational economy of Tiruchengode is intermeshed with local and transnational flows of people and finance, with students enrolling from across India and

also from Korea and Zimbabwe. Rental housing clusters for students have emerged not only in Tiruchengode, but in villages and towns within an over-20 km radius. Like various other economies, the evolution and development of colleges is incremental, and one can find parallels in the history of the lorry re-engineering and borewell assembly clusters.

Many of these institutions are organised as partnership enterprises with entrepreneurs from diverse class and caste backgrounds. The first in Tiruchengode to enter this business was a group of retired school teachers who invested their pension fund in it. The town's Vidya Vikas School (VVS), with branches across Tamil Nadu and in Malaysia and Singapore, is one of the first-generation schools. Established in the mid-90s with the claim that its students would be assured of admission to professional colleges, the VVS has expanded from a modest thatched structure to a campus of around 45 acres that includes a nursery-to-higher-secondary boarding school and an engineering college. Nearly 22,000 students reside here.

Another group of entrepreneurs comprises large capitalists from Tiruchengode and the neighbouring districts of Erode and Coimbatore who have converted mill lands into institutional campuses. Another real estate practice draws on profits from textile mills. Small-scale businessmen form a third entrepreneurial tier. This group is a fairly recent entrant and invests in the institutional hierarchy depending on its members' status and networks. A key informant of mine here runs a tea stall in a lorry re-engineering cluster, and also holds shares in a polytechnic college. According to him, given the present high land price, investing in education infrastructure was his best option. A college investment is also attractive because of the relatively lower demand it makes on its investors' time.

The fourth group of promoters are the caste associations, of which there are several in the town. Each invests in a college or a polytechnic, seen as a necessary condition for the mobility of their community. Besides being

a revenue generator, these institutions keep a certain percentage of seats for their community members, who may also avail of fee relaxations.

For a small town of 83,000 population, Tiruchengode's real estate value matches that in some of the rapidly urbanising larger towns of India. Even in the peripheral parts, the going rate for undeveloped land is between Rs 2,000-4,000/sq ft. What drives the land dynamics of this town? I posed this question time and again to Tiruchengode entrepreneurs; some of their responses are as follows:

... This place is like a mini-Mumbai...¹⁰

... cannot give any logical explanation... all we know is that bore well enterprises generate a large surplus... quantum of profit generated is so huge that you have to sink it into land even if it may not pay in future.¹¹

With the rise in real estate activities, a hierarchy has developed among the town's real estate developers. First come the 'wholesale land assemblers', who assemble 100 acres or more and prefer to sell to college entrepreneurs directly. The land assembly is facilitated through a network of local political activists or land owners. The second are those who deal with land development of between one and 30 acres. The third are those who plot land and transact in sites for which they have developed various schemes. Further down the hierarchy are the retail traders of plots. Almost every small entrepreneur doubles as a retail trader for a developer. The various agents in this hierarchy transact through their networks. They do not advertise, nor are there any real estate agents' shops to be found in the bazaar. Those who operate from a shop are retail traders who transact through brokers in each village or locality. My initial attempts to research the real estate of this town were frustrated due to the invisibility of land developers and their network transactions.

A more recent trend, according to a high-end real estate developer, is of real estate surplus going into agribusiness, and not in Tiruchengode alone, but with investments being

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made as far as Arakonam, Coimbatore, Palani and the state's Chevrayan hills. The developer confirmed that the 2008 financial crisis and the present inflation do not affect real estate markets here as they are driven by the different logic of the rig well and lorry re-engineering economy.

The above section illustrates the various fields and forces influencing the constitution of Tiruchengode's territories. As mentioned in the introduction, city territories and specifically those of small towns are interpreted as projections of the urban master plan or as the spill-over of metro economic dynamics. Neither of these projections completely describes the Tiruchengode dynamics. The fallacy of reducing the town to a master plan or a singular logic has been argued by Benjamin (2012). In this part of the essay, I focus on another assumption – that of the perfection and completeness of the plan, and the notion that it is built on accurate and complete information about the city.

II Projections of the Transparent Plan

The history of cities, at whatever scale, shows that much of the city often develops outside or prior to the preparation of a master plan. The story of Tiruchengode is no different. While Tiruchengode is supposed to have a plan, the practices described above were influenced by a variety of other institutional processes. The town's municipality was constituted in 1978, and the task of preparing a master plan was vested with the district headquarters, then located in Salem. The municipality's jurisdiction is limited to the town; its periphery is governed by several village *panchayats*. Besides the master plan, infrastructure investments, which have a bearing on territoriality, are shaped by Central government funding or multilateral funding routed via financing institutions. Their projections for the city are detailed in the City Development Plans (CDPs), which are dominantly drafted by consultants. A consultant group was commissioned to

prepare a CDP for Tiruchengode in 2002, but the plan is yet to materialise.

The plan, Srivatsan (2012) argues, is “state speak”, far disconnected from practices on the ground. Tracing the history of planning for Chennai city, he shows that although attempts had been made since 1919 to prepare a first master plan for the city, it was actually prepared in the 70s. By 1970, barring a few interventions for specific neighbourhoods, most parts of the city had developed – before the plan was prepared. The city's second master plan, intended to develop an IT corridor, also underwent a similar trajectory. Though work on it started in the mid-90s, it was mired in a court case and was not approved until 2005. As a retired chief planner of Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) involved in the plan quipped,

Planning does not begin and end with the preparation of the master plan. It happens all the time... [In] a city, people are engaged in the process of planning how to put their land to use, how to develop it – some of it, far ahead of the master plan... The plan or the survey information does not tell us about all this. When we do the master plan, we make a judgement based on our knowledge of the city... [but] the city is dynamic – always changing. My point is, how can you produce accurate information about the city?... The master plan represents a layer of information – but the city develops irrespective of it...

A more concerning language is the reduction of city practices to a singular institutional process and document, viz., the master plan. As the planner's narrative indicates, the various projections are often built on imperfect and incomplete information. The master plan, in his view, is to be seen as a directive, not a blue print. While experienced planners recognise this, the plan is used in practice as a reference point in drawing the boundaries of legality and illegality.

A more concerning language is the reduction of city practices to a singular institutional process and document, viz., the master plan. As the planner's narrative indicates, the various projections are often built on imperfect and incomplete information.

To date, land projections are based on data archived in 1956. Each regime adopts its own registers for recording land details. There is often a margin of variation, and it invariably does not perfectly match the situation on the ground.

Another variation of this attempt to generate perfect information is in the taking of numerous surveys of people and the places they occupy. Tiruchengode witnessed the first post-Independence survey of all its *poramboke*, or common land, in 2011, aiming to build complete and perfect information about the town. However, to date, land projections were based on data archived in the cadastral map of 1956. Each regime adopts its own registers for recording land details. There is often a margin of variation in the information recorded, and it invariably does not perfectly match the situation on the ground, as the case below indicates.

Survey [is] a very difficult exercise... The survey numbers and block numbers, under which information about a plot is recorded, are revised regularly... The measurements of a plot recorded in the cadastral map are a negotiated boundary, and this is something you cannot fix accurately on the ground... The land you are sitting on once belonged to Adyar zamin, which at one time controlled the entire village of Kottur... My grandfather invested all his earnings from Burma in land here and was one of the biggest land owners. When the British annexed Madras Presidency, Adyar zamin transferred all the land under their jurisdiction to the British administration. The sales of our land as well as what we retained are recorded in the zamin register. In parallel, the British put in place their own register. Subsequently, soon after the settlement survey, the British earmarked it for acquisition... We were paying land tax to the zamin, which was recorded in a separate tax register. The British did not follow this register. Their records were based on the Madras Presidency settlement survey. When the British surveyed our land, they had allotted a new block number (which is B) and then a village number, 120. Although the British system allowed for an error in the chain survey, their boundaries did not match with the measurements on the zamin tax

register. The administration of the territory now came under the Madras Municipal Corporation of the Madras Presidency. When the corporation prepared a town planning map in the adjoining area, another number was given to it – which is the town scheme number. So for this place, you have block B, village no. 120 and TS 136. Besides, there is a number allotted to each plot at the time of survey, which is recorded in the field measurement book maintained by the tehasildar of the revenue department. With every subdivision of a plot, new numbers get added, usually as a /x... when there is a change in land tenure – due to sale, family partition – the subdivisions are to be updated in the Field measurement book. Occasionally, the revenue department may re-allot survey numbers, and you will find in some cases the new and the old numbers. Information in these various records often does not match. This mismatch is not a simple issue of human errors, but differences arising with the changes in the system of recording, including conversion of measurement, categories recorded...

*Interview with R,
ex-Chief Planner, Permit Division, CMDA*

The complexity of settling plot boundaries is not specific to the metros alone, but is also found in small towns like Tiruchengode. Transactions in the town were not recorded until the 2000s, when, according to a local land revenue officer, influential occupiers got land under their control recorded in the government registers or changed names in existing records. In this town, where loans are given either on land or jewellery, lenders have got records changed with the connivance of higher officials.

In Tiruchengode, the 2011 survey was driven by government exigency to leverage land for generating finance. The exercise was meant to regularise property demarcations on an as-is-where-is basis, in order to levy tax on occupiers

The moral value attached to the rhetoric of transparency and the legitimacy accorded to digital documents are issues to grapple with, but a critical take is often met with resistance in both academia and progressive politics.

and use the remaining land for other purposes. As much as it benefited socio-economically weaker groups in regularising their occupancy, it has also been used by financiers to transfer records to their names. The projections of the plan or legal title can also be viewed as part of strategies to open spaces for some groups over others to settle their claims to land.

The resolution of property-related conflicts and the generation of perfect information about a city are sought in the production of more plans, surveys and, recently, through GIS-enabled documents. The production of these archives is undertaken by almost all agencies in a city, both within and outside the state, but although maps are produced in multiple domains, they are neither easily accessible nor visible. The use to which these are put remains a black box.

A concerning trend in recent times is the legitimisation of the projections of the plan via technology and visibility. The moral value attached to the rhetoric of transparency and the legitimacy accorded to digital documents are issues to grapple with in contemporary politics. 'Transparency' by itself is assumed to be an intrinsically benign and progressive ideal. A critical take on the idiom of transparency is often met with resistance in both academia and progressive politics. That which is visible and audible is assumed to be progressive and, conversely, opacity connotes a regressive position

Can transparency lead to resolution of conflict? Perhaps yes and no. The substantive issue is, can the invisibility of the city be captured? If so, it raises the question of what is being made transparent. Who is made visible and for whose benefit?

Conclusion: Practices of Territory and Projections

This essay illustrated the disconnections between practices of constituting territories in a small town in Tamil Nadu and the projections of such places. The history of occupancies, explored in the first section, illustrated the multiplicity of logics, forces and realms influencing the configuration of small town

territories. The territorial logic of this town is closely shaped by a juxtaposition of different histories operating at various geographical scales. It also showed the invisibility of city practices. The territory story of Tiruchengode is crafted in different geographical and political realms of state and party politics. It is infused as much with the logics of economy and politics as with those of spirituality and caste networking. To explain Tiruchengode's territorial story within an economic logic or a master plan logic would be reductionistic.

Further, the narratives of planners discussed in the second section reinforced the dynamism of cities and the incomplete information based on which projections are made. The gap is sought to be closed through better planning, strict enforcement and people's participation – among other slogans. The project of generating accurate information about the city for better planning has led to a spiralling array of surveys, digital plans and digital cadastres. These efforts seek to galvanise a logic of legitimacy and reality around the language of technology and visibility. But do these projections of a transparent city hide as much as they reveal?

The fluidity of the city and its invisibility raises two issues about the manner in which cities are projected. One relates to the need for a new vocabulary to read and write about cities. The focus on city practices and the lens of the force field is useful in this context. Two, is the acceptance of incompleteness and incoherence in the text. How complete can information on a city be at a particular time? The import of this is that information is often imperfect and open to contestations. How do we acknowledge this in our representation of the city? This calls for a different style of writing that would allow for incompleteness, contradictions and disjunctures. ■

Notes

- 1 This way of reading city territories as a fluid, dynamic and unpredictable politics builds on several on-going and previous research collaborations and discussions with Solomon Benjamin.
- 2 This observation draws on the findings of an on-going research on the production and use of digital spatial information in Chennai. A co-authored article, Raman and Denis (forthcoming), "Digital Tools for Planning Chennai Metropolitan Region: The (mis) Matching Virtual GIS Generated City and Ground Realities", is under review.
- 3 Interview with descendant of the first settler community, 23 June 2011.
- 4 I have referred to the Mudaliars and the Gounders as caste categories in this essay. However, it is useful to note that there is a disagreement as to whether these categories refer to caste communities or to titles assigned to local chieftains. One view among the town settlers is that terms such as 'gounder' and 'mudaliar' are titles conferred on their ancestors by the king under whom they served as chieftains, but later categorised by the British as castes. The nomenclature of sub-castes within these groups – such as Vellala Gounder (agricultural caste), Vanniya Gounder (labourers, often with limited control over the land), Vettuva Gounder (also in agriculture but holding themselves to be of a different lineage from the Vellars) – suggests that Gounder caste members were in diverse occupations and trace their lineage to different histories. Mudaliars, in contrast, were predominantly in agriculture and weaving (see also Mines 1984).
- 5 The other weaving castes of the region are the Devanga Chettiars, itinerant traders specialising in silk. Today most have moved into retail trade or finance, and can be found in the villages adjoining Tiruchengode.
- 6 Numerous caches of Roman and Greek coins have been found in Tamil Nadu, dating from the first to the third century CE, and there are early Tamil references to the Greeks.
- 7 This, according to the president of Tiruchengode's Gounder caste council and lorry owners' association, was a sector formerly controlled by the Muslim entrepreneurs of Namakkal, who in British times were the region's only transport carriers. At present, they are predominantly in metal repair or retail trade of leather and electronic goods in both towns.
- 8 The Asaris are craftspeople who worked with different materials – wood, iron, brass, bronze and gold. Kollar Asaris specialised in metal work.
- 9 The Marvari community today dominates the wholesale textile trade at the national level; they are also in the turmeric trade, the surplus from which is channelled into textile and real estate across Tamil Nadu.
- 10 Interview with a Tiruchengode spare parts shop owner, 31 July 2012.
- 11 Interview with a financier-cum-rig well business partner, Mudaliar quarters, 7 April 2012.

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PROJECTIONS OF AN URBAN REVOLUTION

Aylwyn Walsh + Myrto Tsilimpounidi *

* MINISTRY OF UNTOLD STORIES

Sophie Nield provides a detailed characterisation of protests as ‘theatre’ – remarking on the limitations of the term as somehow distinguishing between what is ‘real’ and what is not real (Nield, 2006:54). The performance of protest and revolt is then tested by its own incursions into the ‘real’, when symbolic actions (such as marching, shouting slogans, waving banners) are adumbrated by violence, arrests and rioting. Nield suggests, following Lefebvre, that alternative spaces and times are produced, shifted and determined by radical performances of dissent.

In this paper, we engage with the ways protesters ‘project’ potential new ways of being together by mapping a city space through solidarity and in opposition to oppressive forces, by projecting images of Athens, a city facing unprecedented social mobilisation in response to crippling cuts in economic and social programmes.

The singular compelling imagery of ‘occupying’ as a form of resistance is its multiplicity of voices – the collective mobilisation of the ‘multitude’. Yet the force and urgency of a collective resistance lies in the individual untold stories of its proponents. Rather than glorify the movement as a faceless entity, we embrace the daily stories, struggles and wounds of occupation. ‘Occupation’ is not a risk-free activity; it is underscored by the need for resistance to counter multiple forms of domination and exploitation. Yet resistance must acknowledge the need for personal transformations in order to make a claim for wider social change. We ask you to join us on an embodied trip to discover the streets and squares of Athens and how everyday moments of resistance are performed. There are many forms of occupation and different pathways to social change. Nothing exists in an absolute state. Yet, through small gatherings and everyday gestures,

A European protester expresses solidarity with all oppressed peoples during a march in Athens, 2012

we hold the power to destroy the hegemonic blueprint of social order. It is the dynamic of such social projections on the urban fabric that the paper attempts to capture. We do not argue that these projections will lead to an emancipatory promised land; they do not operate as prophecies, but rather they open up new spaces of dialogue and creativity.

Theatres of Protest 01

For Nield, there is an important argument to be made about a spatial perspective which “positions protests as activities along a porous border of representation and reality” (Nield, 2006:57), but which also makes a distinction between world-views that are distinct. In other words, the vehemence with which ‘order’ on the streets and ‘public safety’ are defended are in direct opposition to the mobilised public who gather together precisely in order to claim civic spaces as part of the public realm. Dissent, the right to gather peacefully and the right to protest are spatially mapped.

In retaliation, in recent massive gatherings (when German head of state Angela Merkel visited Athens) the Greek police stated 24 hours before the pre-planned gathering that gatherings of more than three people near Constitutional Square would be seen as complicit in the riots. In defiance, protesters assembled there by the thousands, as a means of resisting petty classification. Perhaps this is what Lefebvre might see as a ‘legible’ resistance – a projection of multitudes in city streets that insist on their right to the city. In doing so, new spaces have opened up, in which ‘the outraged’ (*aganaktismenoi*) have interrupted day-to-day life and the power struggles that it brings forth.



Lefebvre highlights how every emancipatory and empowering politic must have a spatial strategy: “a struggle not in but for a space”, a remapping of spaces and lived experiences, etc. (Lefebvre, 1991). The public space of a city has long been a terrain for struggles, protests and encounters. Roads of hope and multiple belonging parallel the functional cityscapes in an eternal dynamic of liberating potentials. Nield points out that oppositional movements that make use of protest strategies or tactics are not merely ‘performative’, but also hold radical potential in the ways they project shifts in how we occupy spaces (Nield, 2006:53).

As our first image demonstrates, a collective protest mobilises the public in ways that trouble the dichotomies between local/global, real and representational. The protester, swathed in a range of flags, disturbs assumptions that oppression is only confined to nation states, and reminds us of the wider context of mobilisation across the globe. The protester is at the same time an individual and is also standing in for all individuals in all the localities he references by the national flags draped across his body. He is both himself and not himself, a projection of 'outside' in the central square of Athens. Central squares are transformed into meeting places for assemblies, and walls occupied by street artists become visual reporting forums on public display, projecting an imagery of an active civil society.

It is compelling to see the 'Occupy' movement as theatrical – we have witnessed people assemble around the symbolic – choosing to congregate in meaning-laden places. We might further scrutinise the 'stage-management' of Occupy movements around the world. Joining hands and voices with the protesters, experiencing police brutality in a peculiar choreography of the occupation of public space. All have the aim of subverting the hegemonic uses of space, by re-appropriating the notion of citizenship. These moments of rupture can open up new possibilities and forge paths of solidarity. These are strange and compelling dances of solidarity, the new ways of being together in spaces where bonds of care are forged not through political affiliations, but through proximity and common experiences. These are performances of civic participation; some theorists have called it direct democracy, some have become enthusiastic about the *agora*, similar to the general assemblies of Occupy, where instead of shouting slogans, people gather together to discuss issues.

A masked figure as a saint,
painted by street artists JNOR/NDA

But it is our assertion that we can use performance in another way as a means of interrogating the collective experiences of people who gather in streets and squares. Much of the media coverage of protests in Athens positioned activists and protesters as 'protagonists' fighting for their cause – or 'antagonists' of the status quo. Such a view positions the implied media consumer as somehow other to these gatherings – as a distant viewer watching the projections of protest and revolt via the screens of sanctioned media. Instead we might even position these gatherings as the audience, who are themselves scrutinising the projections of their realities on the city streets, and who have begun to transgress the divide between projection/reality; audience/participant.



Nield states that:

The space of resistance is a dis-location, rather than an opposition. Other worlds, other spaces, are implicated in it. It can invoke spaces which may not exist yet; which may only exist for the duration of the event, but which, being materialised there, become possible (Nield, 2006:61).

According to Henri Lefebvre, the city is always related to society in totality: its history, main elements, functions and the synthesis thereof. Thus, the city changes whenever society shifts. However the transformation of the city is not the passive result of social cycles. It is also dependent on the direct connections between persons and groups that form society (Lefebvre, 1977:63). The central Athens of previous years is now a terrain of conflict and metamorphosis. Urban identity has been inevitably affected by the current socio-political transformations, as can be witnessed in daily performances of resistance, particularly in the uncanny and imaginative ways people occupy city spaces. We are arguing that resistance is a space of radical openness, in which the self is re-imagined in relation to its landscape – and, in turn, the landscape too is remapped.

Theatres of Protest 02

Myrto (addressing the projections of Athens. She unfolds a letter she has written to Athens and begins to speak back to the city, projected onto the walls and screens):

“Athens, you urban bitch of cement dreams, we have been apart for so long but still I call you ‘home’.

“I grew up in your shadows, or more correctly, I grew up with you – so our relationship follows the Freudian notion of family ties: I’ve embraced you, only to reject you a few years later. Now, from a distance, I am in danger

of becoming nostalgic. Bear with me. Sometimes, I could see myself reflected within your cityscapes, and I think now we’re in the process of resolving the Oedipus complex between us. But let me be a bit more explicit.

“Throughout my first steps, you breastfed me with your urban grand narratives, and in turn I was spellbound by the ‘birthplace of democracy and civilisation’. I sat on marble steps overlooking the Acropolis, reading Plato and Socrates, overwhelmed by an idealistic assurance that this was part of my history.

“It is true that every form of nation-building evokes the sentiments of a glorious past, but you, Athens, believed you had the admiration and acceptance of the whole world. Who was I to question such a great heritage? My urban playground of broken marble pillars and identities.

“It took me some years to read the small letters and the invisible footnotes to this grand story: the Acropolis was the product of slavery; in the great Athenian democracy, only upper-class males had the right to vote; in short, whoever was not an Athenian was a barbarian. You xenophobic snob! During my adolescent urban explorations, I understood that, like many capital cities, you are a city of strangers. Refugees, survivors, displaced people and revolutionaries came to call you home. Stories from the civil war and the dictatorship were commonplace in family gatherings. So many war stories and different names for ‘the barbarians’ – I’ve lost count. In modern Greek history, we were the first generation to not experience war – whether as civil war or military coup. Thirty-five years of peace – enough to create a dream of *la dolce vita*.

“But, Athens, cities are like living organisms; they do not explicitly tell their past, but contain it in the small alleys

and cracks on the buildings. And your maps signify a thousand stories: not all of them glorious and genteel. Anyone could have predicted something like the social crisis you have experienced over the last two years, if they just understood the bubble. For the last 15 years, Athenians have experienced the Cinderella phenomenon: a sense of prosperity, an expanding job market related to the Olympic Games of 2004, new infrastructure. People were lulled into a sense of financial security, driving fancy cars; this was a generation of Ray Bans, nightlife, *opa!*

“We lived our myth of Europeanisation and the Western lifestyle to the extreme. We had achieved our pumpkin chariot: a European profile and a happily-ever-after capitalistic lifestyle. And the clock struck midnight... and Cinderella transformed...

“Us: a generation implicated in bribery, clientelism, corruption and mismanagement.

“You: a city still looking for the Barbarians – like a mythic heroine blinded by hubris, yet to wake up to the realities of your present situation”.

The projections begin to fade. Athens is no longer a steadfast image of a glorious capital city, but a site of conflict and renegotiation. A city of multiple projections and desires.

The ‘occupations’ are neither crushed nor quelled; they are transformed into new ways of being in the city, with a new mode of examining the frames governing our behaviours. There is a call, then, in navigating street politics and performances of resistance, to rework ‘the right to the city’ as the ability to transform the self and imagine the city to come. The existing order is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution; it is a condition, a certain



relationship between human beings, a mode of behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently (Landauer 2005:165).

By encountering flickers and stories of urban change through media, images and this brief paper, we are ourselves projected into the spaces of change. Together, we may conquer the current space of economic austerity and produce spaces in which new potential can emerge. ■



Protesters and fire projecting each other
PHOTOS: MYRTO TSILIMPOUNIDI
COURTESY MINISTRY OF UNTOLD STORIES

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THE UNKNOWN CITIZEN

Chandan Gomes



9:15 pm, 16 December 2012

I made a photograph of my dear friend S in a nearly empty bus. We were on our way to a colleague's flat for a get together. Around the same time, not far from where we were, a 23-year-old paramedic student was being brutally assaulted in a nearly empty bus, just like ours. Her friend was also not spared.

The next day I woke up to the news of her ordeal and the presence of that photograph.

I too took to the streets, like the many young women and men of this city, in a bid to get rid of our collective helplessness. We wanted to reclaim a city that we had lost to our apathy and indifference.

Thousands of us occupied Rajpath, the most powerful corridor in our country. Tear gas shells were fired and water cannons were deployed to disperse us, to scare us. Many were heartlessly beaten.

We tried to protect each other by forming human chains. We shared water and Parle G biscuits; we shared stories and memories. We held our ground for we knew we were bound to each other by compassion. Slowly but steadily the movement found its way in every neighbourhood, every alleyway of Delhi. Similar protests were triggered across the country.

Ordinary citizens, faceless citizens, unknown citizens came out onto the streets; they were not called upon by a political or a religious outfit – they came out on their own to occupy a space that rightfully belonged to them, to confront their passiveness and of those around them.



On the 22nd and 23rd of December 2012, we felt the pain and the insult that fellow countrymen in Manipur, Kashmir and Koodankulam have been bearing for quite some time now.





I took this photograph just after
being dragged by the collar by a policeman. I too would have been beaten up if it were not for the camera in my hand.



Over 350 tear gas shells were fired at India Gate on the 23rd of December.



Water cannons were also employed every now and then.

The poster reads 'We are ashamed'.



She passed away on 29th December, 2012.

We knew we had let her down.

We knew she, like many others before her, had fallen victim to our apathy and passiveness.



We pledged
not to remain silent;
we pledged to
reclaim our lives,
our freedom.

This city of 'silent' beings has transformed into a city of spirits. They reclaimed this city on the 22nd.
They did it again on the 23rd.



And on the 31st, they reclaimed our nights – desolate bus stops and abandoned roads were transformed into pockets of hope, courage and empathy.

These spirits are faceless. Like you and me.

Thousands have witnessed these protests – some while waiting for their buses, some from their balconies, some in crowded market places.

Maybe only a few thousands candles have been lit, but there are millions who carry their light in their hearts, in their minds.





*Raat mein bhi Azaadi. Din mein bhi Azaadi.
 Pyaar karne ki Azaadi. Dosti karne ki Azaadi.
 Moral Policing se Azaadi. Pehnavi ki Azaadi.
 'Denting-Painting' ki Azaadi.
 Is rape culture se Azaadi. In gaaliyon se Azaadi.
 Jeet ke lengey Azaadi. Pyar se lengey Azaadi.
 Hum le-ke rahengey Azaadi.
 Naye Saal mein Azaadi.
 Kal se lengey Azaadi. Ab se lengey Azaadi.*



*Freedom at night. Freedom during the day.
 Freedom to love. Freedom to form friendships.
 Freedom from moral policing.
 Freedom in what we wear.
 Freedom to be 'Dented-Painted'.
 Freedom from this culture of rape.
 Freedom to not be called names.
 We'll win our freedom.
 With love, we'll take our freedom.
 Whatever happens, we'll snatch our freedom.
 In the new year, there will be freedom.
 From tomorrow, we will seize our freedom.
 From now on, we will seize our freedom.*





Let us not forget,
let us not rest in peace.

BUILT TO LAPSE

THE NEW TRANSPIRING OF AN OLD TIME IN ARCHITECTURE

Venugopal Maddipati

If the house in its early stages is constructed of brick, mud and country tile, then it will not have a life span of more than ten or fifteen years – as compared to an RCC structure which will have a permanent life span of, say, 70 years. But this impermanence is really an advantage. For after fifteen years, when our economy improves, we might presumably have more resources to deal with this problem of housing. As Prof. Charles Abrams has pointed out “renewability should be one of the prime objectives of mass housing in developing countries; for as the nation’s economy develops, the housing patterns change”. The five-story concrete tenement slums built by housing boards all over this country are really the work of pessimists. What they are saying is: we aren’t going to have any future.

Charles Correa¹

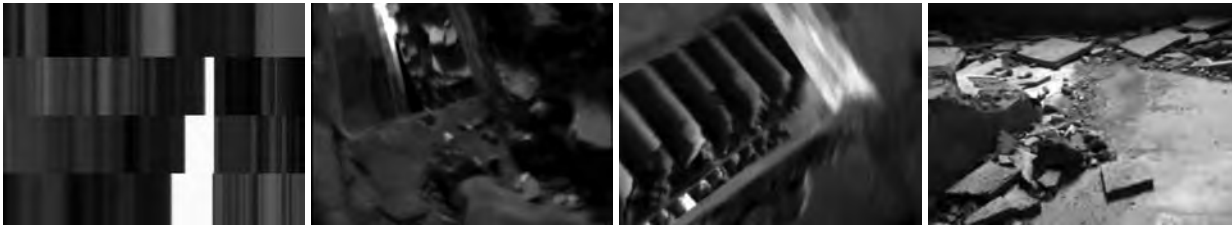
I feel there is too much emphasis today on durability, and so we have a very hard character to most cities. I believe this creates huge problems because cities (especially in places like India in the last two to three decades) are changing at an incredibly fast pace, but the built environment has become more and more stagnant as it is too enduring to be able to adapt with the changing city. There are many spaces that have been put out of use but still maintain a physical presence in the city, whether you look at old factories that have been moved out because of new pollution norms or buildings ‘sealed’ by the state using brutal force. I find a strange beauty in the way buildings get marked in the act of abandonment.

Asim Waqif²

Time, it would appear, has been at a standstill since 1976, when the architect Charles Correa (b. 1930) wrote about the prospects for the future of mass-housing in India in an essay titled “Third World Housing: Space as a Resource”.³ After all, today, the Delhi-based artist Asim Waqif (b. 1978) bemoans the longevity and the resilience of the built environment in India just as despondently as Correa did in his 1976 essay. If Correa in the 1970s, deriving from his commitment towards advancing the cause of urban renewal and low-rise, high-density, vernacular housing forms, had become somewhat disconcerted by the 70-year-long, “permanent life-span” of high-rise, reinforced concrete structures, today, Waqif, who is an architect by training, remains no less deeply disconcerted by the hard character and the excessively enduring nature of the urban architectural fabric.⁴ Indeed, if anything, Waqif, almost as if in keeping with Correa’s insistence on change and renewability from more than 35 years ago, resorts to using such perishable, vernacular materials as bamboo and *sarkanda* (elephant grass) in his own architectural experiments. To the extent that Waqif’s thoughts appear to seamlessly coincide with those of Correa’s in the 1970s, one feels somehow obliged then to take into account the resilience and the excessively enduring nature, if not the very hard character, over time of the epoch that the 1970s were.⁵

And yet, quite apart from the resemblances between the 1970s and the present, there are also the differences between the two moments. Consider, for instance, the manner in which Correa brought, by the means of his 1976 essay, a certain architectural saliency to bear upon the task of thinking as such. If, on the one hand, as is evident in the paragraph cited above, Charles Abrams (1902-1970) had intuited, somewhat open-endedly, that housing patterns could change as and when the state of a country's economy changed, Correa, for his part, had made the life-span of the brick-mud-and-country-tile house itself, that is, the span of 10 to 15 years, into a measure of the amount of time it would take for the economy to change.⁶ Indeed, far from merely only intuiting, or contemplating in the abstract, the impermanence of the economy of 1976, Correa had rendered that impermanence palpable and measurable by taking recourse to a description of the impermanence of a particular kind of architecture, that is, the architecture of a brick-mud-and-country-tile house. Correa, in essence, had brought a certain sensuous architectural legibility to the passage of time itself by resorting to a description of the aging and falling into disrepair of a brick-mud-and-country-tile house.

On the one hand, then, Waqif, in the present, not quite unlike Correa in the past, goes beyond merely only intuiting the passing of time, and aggressively seeks an explicit, external architectural mark that essays, beyond an iota of doubt, transience, or the steady advent of change as such. So much one can observe in Waqif's photographs in his 11 December 2007 entry for his blog-page, blindspot-delhi.blogspot.in, in which he captured how change or decrepitude had crept in, be it in an abandoned, colonial-era food testing depot for the Indian army near Rajpur Road, or in the Palace theatre on Roshanara Road near Pul-Bangash.



On the other hand, Waqif, quite apart from questing for an external architectural mark for the passing of time, also strives to bring into salience the irresoluteness of the very identity of the consciousness whose innate sense of the passing of time is essayed by the advancing of changes or the encroaching of decrepitude into architecture. The passing of whose time, in essence, does the steady ruination of buildings convey? Or, on the contrary, within who does an awareness of the steady encroachment of minutes, hours, days and years into the very fibre of architecture instigate or fuel an anxiety over the transience of things?

That it is such questions Waqif strives to raise is not immediately apparent in his representation of the dark and menacing, seemingly empty-inner-world of an abandoned building that stands on the corner of Barakhamba Road in his 2010 video, *Exploring Derelection*.⁷ Indeed, if the early portions of the video of the building are anything to go by, there can be no question concerning the identity of the viewer. The viewer is Waqif himself. As he stands behind the camera and peers myopically through it at the attrition that the passing of time has wrought upon the building's hard, concrete surfaces, Waqif's own trepidation somehow protrudes into the videographic frame. For instance, as the confused scan-lines in the beginning of the video gradually petrify into the image of a narrow gulley running

between the risers of a run-down, shadowy, dog-leg staircase within the building, one catches a glimpse of the foot of the camera-man nudging the worn-out flakes of a concrete floor-slab, even if it is only very unobtrusively, at the bottom of the video frame. From this point onwards, as the camera tracks over the staircase, one can clearly see that its inexact motion is precipitated by the clumsy, uncertain gait of its bearer, that is, the possessor of the foot, who is now, visibly, lunging, perhaps in dread, over the crumbling risers of the staircase. To whatever aspect of the deteriorating building that receives illumination within the early portions of *Exploring Dereliction*, then, there corresponds in advance, and sometimes visibly within that very illumination, the presence and movement of a bewildered observer: Waqif. The video indubitably, then, is Waqif's effort at archiving his own experience of disorientation within the emptiness of the foreboding inner-world of the abandoned building.

And yet, the appearance of the carcasses of two dogs on the 8th and the 9th floors of the building, more than three minutes into the video, provides the prospects for a far more terrifying narrative. Waqif, as it turns out, had initially befriended the two dogs when he first saw them on the terrace of the building in 2007. The dogs, he suspects, had subsequently been poisoned. As he had noted, somewhat disconsolately, in his blog entry on 28 May 2008: "[D]ont know much about death but it looks like a violent one. [P]erhaps poisoning. [L]ooks like the dogs puked out blood in their last moments. [T]hey were lying half a flight from each other on the 9th floor. [P]erhaps trying to make their way down in desperation".

Who, it begs asking, then, had poisoned the dogs? What is the nature of the consciousness whose handiwork one witnesses on the 8th and the 9th floors? Moreover, how to reconcile the presence of this consciousness, or this being, to the emptiness of the building? In so far as



one reads into this being's poisoning of the dogs as a measure of its reluctance towards entertaining or harbouring companionship within the building, one could perhaps envisage the emptiness of the spaces surrounding the bodies of the dogs as the terrifying outcome of similar attempts, on the part of the same being, at fiercely protecting its own sense of isolation. Indeed, the emptiness of the world of the building could well be some being's idea of perfect solitude.

It takes some courage and imagination, then, to peer past Waqif's seeming absorption with his own movements within the confines of the videographic frame, and to read the encompassing desolation as an explicit external mark of some being's contempt for companionship. What initially appears to be merely Waqif's effort, by the means of videography, at bringing some visibility to his experience of the seemingly empty inner-world of the building only very slowly, and with some amount of reflection, becomes intelligible as an effort at intimating the existence of a consciousness that strives to preserve and sustain, violently even, its own sense of loneliness. Indeed, only very gradually can one begin to construe the presence of nobody within the deeper reaches of Waqif's videographic frame as a marker for the presence of somebody who has already borne witness to all that Waqif witnesses.

It is, then, not merely only Waqif who trolls up the staircase. But rather, it is no-body, or more specifically, nobody one knows who ascends the building and sullenly observes the crumbling risers, the flaking floor-slabs, the steadily disintegrating brick-walls and the rotting carcasses of the two dogs. The steady lapsing into disrepair and decay of the building and its innards on the corner of Barakhamba Road, in essence, marks the passing, in solitude, of the hours, minutes, days and years of no-body.

But then again, in Waqif's own comprehension, quite a few people could be no-bodies. When asked about the communities he encounters in such abandoned buildings, he observes that he mostly knows them to be "people from modest economic backgrounds. Some immigrant labour, some urchins, parking contractors, guards, Jats and Gujjars... also druggies, smackies, beggars, homeless, even Babas and floating people".⁸ Given how crowded the world of abandoned spaces appears in Waqif's description, then, one does find it somewhat difficult to reconcile oneself to the unyielding emptiness, within the videographic frame, of the interiors of the building by the corner of Barakhamba Road. Indeed, one wonders if Waqif, far from only portraying the inner world of abandoned spaces, strives to present videography's enframed view itself as an inherently limited expression of reality. Could it be possible that the emptiness of the building is not only an expression of no-body's desire to keep company; rather, the emptiness also attests to the blindness of videography itself towards no-bodies? If such is indeed the case, then Waqif, in spite of being a videographer, no doubt views videography itself as a toxin that thwarts presence. If poison may have served to summarily empty the building, videography perhaps also works, as if it were a poison, to root out life and to embrace merely only the emptiness of architecture.⁹

Exploring Dereliction,
Asim Waqif, 2010
IMAGES COURTESY THE ARTIST



Time, it would seem, then, has indeed passed since the 1970s. On the one hand, Correa, in 1976, had presented the evanescence of buildings as a definite measure of the lapsing of time. On the other hand, in the present, Waqif strives to seek and identify the consciousness for which the evanescence of buildings is a measure of the lapsing of time. If, in 1976, Correa had confidently promoted the transience of architecture as a vivid external mark for an intuition over the transience of an era, today, Waqif's videographic gaze scours the horizon, inquiring and seeking for the stranger, that is, the no-body, whose sense of transience finds expression in the transience of architecture. What was once a confident assertion in 1976, then, has given way, perhaps owing to the ravages of time, to a question. ■

Notes

- 1 Charles M. Correa, "Third World Housing: Space as a Resource". In **EKISTICS** 41(242), p. 37 (January 1976).
- 2 Excerpt from an interview with Asim Waqif in Blessy Augustine, "Building Blocks: Asim Waqif Infuses Khoj's Under-Renovation Space with Groovy Soundscapes", 19 June 2012. Available at: <http://>

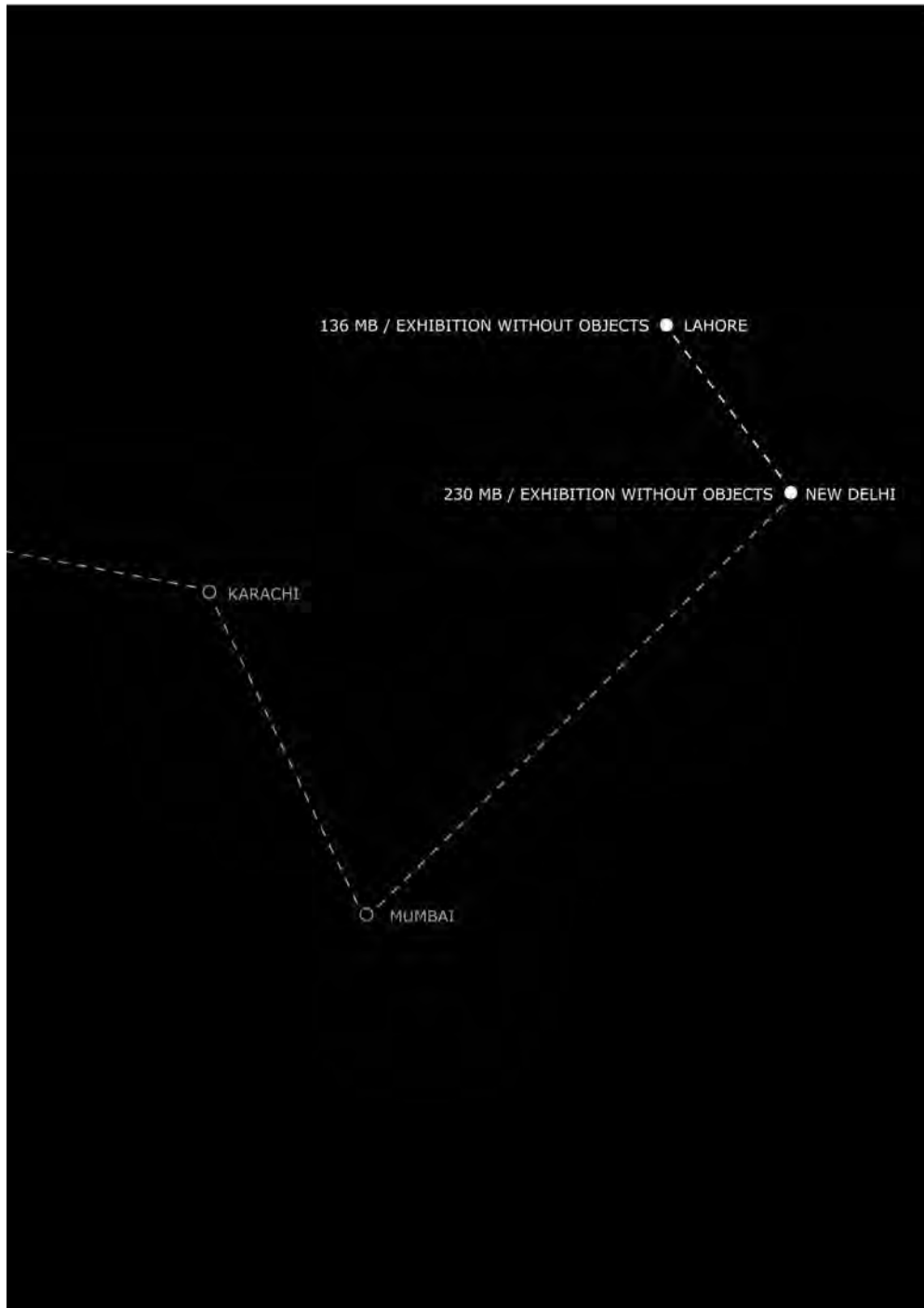
in.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/809600/building-blocks-asim-waqif-infuses-khoj%E2%80%99s-under-renovation-space-with-groovy-soundscapes (last accessed 13 December 2012).

- 3 Writing about housing from the vantages of urban planning and architecture, Correa was exploring, at the time, an architectural determinism in which particular kinds of spatial innovations and interventions within the urban fabric became harbingers of conviviality. Through the course of his essay, in essence, be it in the manner in which he wrote about community and fraternising almost exclusively in the context of the size and the scale of neighbourhood meeting places, or be it in the manner in which he promoted a low-rise, medium density pattern of housing growth as “an exact urban analogue” of Gandhi’s vision of rural India. Correa had stayed in sight of social conviviality as a mood that could be fostered by precise, clearly ascertained, architectural interventions in the cities of India.
- 4 Somewhat in keeping with a larger, global fascination with seeing the cities of the future become what one observer at the time, Adolf Ciborowski, had titled “improved squatter settlements”, Correa sought, through 1976, to promote a transient, horizontal city. To read more about the proceedings of the international seminar held in advance of the UN conference on human settlements in Vancouver in June 1976, in which Correa and Ciborowski expressed their views concerning the future of cities, refer to “Habitat: Not Another Doomsday Catalogue”, in **New Scientist**, pp. 85-87 (8 April 1976).
- 5 Besides Correa, the architect, Jai Sen, also wrote in 1976 about urban planning, particularly from the vantages of the urban poor. Unlike Correa, however, Sen sought to essay the unintended consequences of urban planning experimentation. Jai Sen. “The Unintended City”. In **Seminar** 200, pp. 38-47 (April 1976).
- 6 I am yet to locate the larger text by Charles Abrams from which Correa had provided the quotation. Charles Abrams was a noted urban planner who had written, from the 40s through the 60s, about housing and home ownership.
- 7 Asim Waqif. **Exploring Dereliction**. Available at: ,<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fujWBjCJJXw> (last accessed 13 December 2012). In an interview, Waqif mentioned that “the building in Exploring Dereliction is a result of the changing by-laws of Delhi. I believe Sanjay Gandhi was a proponent of a high-rise CBD for CP, so many tall buildings were commissioned then. I heard that the by-laws changed before this building could be completed so it couldn’t get clearance. And then it got stuck in family disputes. But this is hearsay”. Asim Waqif, online interview by author, Delhi, 21 November 2012. In a blog entry dating to 9 May 2008, on <http://blindspot-delhi.blogspot.in/2008/05/13th-floor.html>, Waqif suggests that the building has “been lying vacant for many years. [A]t the back of the building there is a service lane with parking for the office going crowd of the adjacent buildings. [N]ext to the garbage dump the wall is broken and provides easy access to the building”.
- 8 Asim Waqif, online interview by author, Delhi, 21 November 2012.
- 9 In an interview, Waqif spoke briefly about videography in the context of surveillance. On the one hand, he was opposed to the idea of surveillance through video cameras. On the other hand, he stated that it is important to engage with video surveillance. “Avoiding is more like denying its existence”. Asim Waqif, online interview by author, Delhi, 11 November 2012.



SUBJECT: EXHIBITION WITHOUT OBJECTS

Sadia Shirazi



Exhibition Invitation

Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]>

To: Mehreen Murtaza <[REDACTED]>

Thu, Apr 19, 2012 at 2:39 AM

Dear Mehreen,

I would like to extend an invitation to you to participate in the exhibition that I am curating titled "An Exhibition Without Objects" at The Drawing Room. The concept of the show is situated between two poles of interest – one is formal and the other identity based. My intention in this exhibition in Lahore is to shift attention away from the singular art object and to focus instead on artistic practice.

I have been struck by the way in which contemporary art from Pakistan has had a tendentious relationship with what is perceived as "Pakistani art." The phenomenon by which art from places of conflict garners interest from the global art world at the same time that it dominates international news headlines, more recently, has also resulted in a focus on local artistic production. The attention this places on artists from this country as well as the kind of artwork that comes to represent it are a scenario I believe you, particularly, as an artist have grappled with. I am interested in the way in which your work, formally and conceptually, intersects with these issues.

What I would request of you, as an artist participating in the show is parallel in nature to the interests described above. I am asking you to submit a "visual essay" for the exhibition, which will be showcased in lieu of your art objects. By "visual essay" I mean a series of images that, whether individually or cumulatively, creates a narrative about your artistic practice. I am particularly interested in your research, archives, and other sources of inspiration — musical, textual, cinematic, pedagogical, etc. — that influence you. The essay can also be considered as an invitation to critically rethink digital presentations that are ubiquitous in the art context (studio visits, etc.) and to play with the temporality of and immateriality of the projected image. I will curate the visual essays that are submitted by all participating artists and these will take up the central space of the exhibition's display as a projection.

During the run of the exhibition, special attention will be given to the gallery as a temporal space that shifts and changes with time, where the exhibition functions simultaneously as a space of display and discourse. In conjunction, the second thing I will ask of you, as an artist in the show, is to contribute in some way to the exhibition's temporal matrix. Depending on your visual essay, for example, if one of your images deals with a published text – in whatever way you choose to document/describe/visualize it – I would ask that you then also choose a slot of time during the exhibition's run to take an opportunity to create a discussion/event/performance/reading around it. If, on the other hand, there is a film that figures largely in your consciousness right now, and again, you can refer to it in any way in your visual essay, I would add it to an ongoing film screening list that will occur at the gallery during the run of the exhibition. Whatever the content of your contribution, I will work with you on developing the active portion of your submission and assisting in its programming.

Lastly, the exhibition will have a day during which films will be screened, morning until night. For this particularly I ask each artist to suggest two films, videos, etc. that are influential for you, in some regard. These will then be screened during the run of the exhibition.

I kindly ask for your submissions by the 3rd of May 2012. Submissions can be dropped off at the gallery on a CD or DVD or shared online via dropbox. The submission package should include three things, first, a visual essay as a powerpoint or PDF file (the projector resolution is 1024 x 768; please play around with your images to find the right resolution, sometimes a higher resolution than the projector makes the image look better), the second is a word file that sketches out the kind of event you would participate in that extrapolates on some aspect of your visual essay and any particular gallery support or materials this might entail (for example, discursive event that requires projector, sound equipment, furniture, etc.), and finally, a word file that includes the two film/video titles, director, and country of origin, for the screening. Please organize your submission into a folder titled with your name "First_Last" and then

three subfolders, using your surname and "VisualEssay," the next "Programming" and the last "Films." So, for example, main folder "Marina_Abramovic" and subfolders Abramovic_VisualEssay, Abramovic_Programming and Abramovic_Films. The exhibition and this letter requesting particular things from you is meant as a kind of dialogue between you and I, between the curator and artist and, so, I look forward to your creative responses to this query. I will be in touch the week of the 3rd of May by phone to follow up with you and discuss the second aspect of the exhibition's programming matrix as well as logistics.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions regarding this letter and the exhibition. I look forward to your response and our continued conversation,

Sincerely,

Sadia Shirazi

Exhibition Meeting

15 May 2012

Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]> Sat, May 19, 2012 at 8:00 AM
To: Rabbya Naseer <[REDACTED]>, Hurmat Ahmed <[REDACTED]>, Mehreen Murtaza <[REDACTED]>, Saira Sheikh <[REDACTED]>, Ayesha Jatoi <[REDACTED]>, Huma Mulji <[REDACTED]>

Dear Artists,

The show has been a very dynamically expanding and contracting list of participants, and as of now you are the ladies in the lineup. I've really enjoyed the conversations I have had with each of you regarding the exhibition and wanted to bring everyone together for a meeting. The nature of the exhibition seems more and more to me not just about the conversations I am having with each of you but also of the conversation we will have as a group.

Please let me know if a meeting next Tuesday at The Drawing Room works for you all - I will have a computer with me and internet to skype with Hurmat - the time is flexible for me, I will propose a morning meeting, say at 10AM but do let me know what times suit you.

Regards,
Sadia

Exhibition Update + Questions

15 May 2012

Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]> Fri, May 25, 2012 at 12:40 AM
To: Ayesha Jatoi <[REDACTED]>, Rabbya Naseer <[REDACTED]>, Hurmat Ahmed <[REDACTED]>, Mehreen Murtaza <[REDACTED]>, Saira Sheikh <[REDACTED]>
Cc: Huma Mulji <[REDACTED]>

Dear Ladies,

I wanted to share some updates regarding the opening, install dates, etc.

The invite cards have just arrived at the gallery ... I am attaching the front and back of the cards here...

I also have some questions for the group:

1) Event/Conversation - Wall Text? I was wondering whether... it would make sense to have wall text about...works in the space. These could be...'traces' of the event. What do you guys think? I thought it might be a playful inverse of the usual wall text for objects - so wall text for events that are time based and immaterial otherwise.

...

3) Does anyone have an event they would consider a "Performance"? Rabbya and Hurmat's is not. Mehreen's is a sound installation, Saira's is an "event," Ayesha's is a "conversation". Just checking in for language of the "pamphlet"...

2 attachments



Exhibition_WO_FRONT_FINAL_PRINT.png
74K



Exhibition_WO_BACK_FINAL_PRINT.png
87K

Rabbya Naseer <[REDACTED]>

Fri, May 25, 2012 at 11:03 AM

To: Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]>

Cc: Ayesha Jatoi <[REDACTED]>, Hurmat Ahmed <[REDACTED]>, Mehreen Murtaza <[REDACTED]>, Saira Sheikh <[REDACTED]>, Huma Mulji <[REDACTED]>

-i'm all for wall text, i agree, it works nicely as remains of immaterial happenings.

...

-certainly, 'performance' is not suitable for what we are doing, more of an occurrence perhaps, situation, event or an encounter may be.....

Saira Sheikh <[REDACTED]>

Fri, May 25, 2012 at 11:33 AM

To: Rabbya Naseer <[REDACTED]>

Cc: Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]>, Ayesha Jatoi <[REDACTED]>, Hurmat Ahmed <[REDACTED]>, Mehreen Murtaza <[REDACTED]>, Huma Mulji <[REDACTED]>

> i agree, regarding the wall text, it'd works as 'traces'

> would not need a title page for my powerpoint, have my name in the end of the presentation in any case...

> yeah, mine is also not a 'performance'; a dia-logic or poly-logic event i guess...

xxx

[Quoted text hidden]

-

saira

Ayesha Jatoi <[REDACTED]>

Fri, May 25, 2012 at 5:14 PM

To: Rabbya Naseer <[REDACTED]>

Cc: Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]>, Saira Sheikh <[REDACTED]>, Hurmat Ahmed <[REDACTED]>, Mehreen Murtaza <[REDACTED]>, Huma Mulji <[REDACTED]>

I suppose my "non-event" is a performance of sorts

Sent from my iPad

[Quoted text hidden]

Ayesha Jatoi <[REDACTED]> Sat, May 26, 2012 at 10:20 AM
 To: Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]>
 Cc: Rabbya Naseer <[REDACTED]>, Saira Sheikh <[REDACTED]>, Hurmat Ahmed <ahumat@gmail.com>, Mehreen Murtaza <[REDACTED]>, Huma Mulji <[REDACTED]>

Who has read:

"Six Years: the dematerialisation of the art object from 1966 to 1972" Lucy R. Lippard...

Rabbya you must ve read a few chapters in atteqa's MA seminar but for those who haven't I can photocopy and bring to gallery.

Sadia, the opening piece in this book "Escape Attempts" is extremely interesting and addresses a lot of the things we ve discussed...

Sent from my iPhone

Mehreen Murtaza <[REDACTED]> Sat, May 26, 2012 at 6:53 PM
 To: Ayesha Jatoi <[REDACTED]>
 Cc: Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]>, Rabbya Naseer <[REDACTED]>, Saira Sheikh <[REDACTED]>, Hurmat Ahmed <[REDACTED]>, Huma Mulji <[REDACTED]>

I would love to have a copy Ayesha!

I haven't read this text but I was thinking along the lines of Victor Burgin's "Situational Aesthetics" (1969) – the notion that concepts of artistic form (the object) should be redefined by not as manufactured "things" but as "experiences."

Martin Creed's Things & Feelings comes to mind:
<http://www.csw.art.pl/index.php?action=aktualnosci&s2=1&id=195&lang=eng>

"This extensive, varied exhibition, Things Evoke Feelings, takes "things" (art, we suppose) from the Centre for Contemporary Art's collection and divides them into several themes. Starting off the Martin Creed's "Things" and "Feelings" pieces, the exhibition presents such themes as Passion for Construction, the Trauma of Ideology, Breath, Women's Revolt, Patience, and the Oppression of the Everyday."

[Quoted text hidden]

Sadia Shirazi <sshirazi@gmail.com> Sun, May 27, 2012 at 2:35 AM

To: Mehreen Murtaza <[REDACTED]>
 Cc: Ayesha Jatoi <[REDACTED]>, Rabbya Naseer <[REDACTED]>, Saira Sheikh <[REDACTED]>, Hurmat Ahmed <[REDACTED]>, Huma Mulji <[REDACTED]>

Ayesha, I haven't read it, just actually downloaded "Out of Place" and "Hot Potatoes: Art and Politics in 1980," I would love a copy of the "Escape Attempts," too - I'm wondering, too, if for our event we have a kind of reading list that we, the discussants, share with one another to prepare for the talk. There is also an essay on "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" (2004) by Claire Bishop that...was written as a response to Nicolas Bourriard's "Relational Aesthetics" (1998): "Relational art is 'a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space' where 'the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever scale chosen by the artist.'" Claire Bishop critiques the supposedly democratic nature of Bourriard's "relational aesthetics" and also asks "if relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what *types* of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?"

...

Mehreen, do you have that text you referred to, too, to share?

There is also the context of useful / useless art - Tania Bruguera, the Cuban performance artist insists that art should be useful, utilitarian, etc. I moderated a discussion between her, Radhika Subramaniam (curator / professor), Herbert Marcuse (urban planner / lawyer), and the head of CUP (Center for Urban Pedagogy) whose name just slipped my mind - but I was really struck by the different positions between Bruguera and Subramaniam. Basically, the latter was more weary of the utilization of "art" and suspect of it being co-opted...

[Quoted text hidden]

Rabbya Naseer <[REDACTED]>

Sun, May 27, 2012 at 4:43 AM

To: Ayesha Jatoi <[REDACTED]>

Cc: Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]>, Saira Sheikh <[REDACTED]>, Hurmat Ahmed <[REDACTED]>, Mehreen Murtaza <[REDACTED]>, Huma Mulji <[REDACTED]>

these are all very relevant and Kaprow's 'happenings' - i think reading list is a great idea!

sadia, will see you at the gallery today, hopefully at 2

[Quoted text hidden]

Mehreen Murtaza <[REDACTED]>

Sun, May 27, 2012 at 9:46 AM

To: Rabbya Naseer <[REDACTED]>

Cc: Ayesha Jatoi <[REDACTED]>, Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]>, Saira Sheikh <[REDACTED]>, Hurmat Ahmed <[REDACTED]>, Huma Mulji <[REDACTED]>

Sharing these texts with everyone:

1. Situational Aesthetics, Victor Burgin (1969)
2. Art without work? Anton Vidokle (e-flux journal)

Also, I would have loved to share this book with everyone if possible because i don't have a digital or physical copy of it as yet. But here is an excerpt:

"Out of the studio! (page 77): When works of art are created and exhibited outside the traditional places – galleries, museums, or art centers – various risks have to be considered. If the art works do not take into account the environment in which they appear, they might not find their appropriate dimension; but if they take into account all the supposed constraints, they might become too consensual.

Furthermore, throughout all these recent public art initiatives around the world, the question of art as a touristic product is raised more than ever. Along with this comes the question of art being used by politicians, sponsors and even curators. What is the right attitude towards this? As Daniel Birnbaum questions: 'Isn't non-productivity one of the most radical and violent means to counteract dominant structures? Do you use the notion of a product in your artistic practice?' We could answer as Carsten Höller did: 'You are right about the violence in non-productivity, but I would also say that no n-productivity is almost an impossible concept in practical terms. I think that non-productivity will most of the time lead you to something. (Maybe I am just thinking on Francis Alys' two video works, Paradox of Practice... (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing and Sometimes Making Nothing Leads to Something). I think non-productivity should be understood as a creative tool and not only as a reference framework or an activist practice. I understand that a product could be anything that is the consequence of an action (even if it is a minimal one) without needing to be an object, contrary to the way the capitalist system understands it."

[Quoted text hidden]

Huma Mulji <[REDACTED]>

Sun, May 27, 2012 at 12:26 PM

Reply-To: Huma Mulji <[REDACTED]>

To: Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]>, Mehreen Murtaza <[REDACTED]>

Cc: Ayesha Jatoi <[REDACTED]>, Rabbya Naseer <[REDACTED]>, Saira Sheikh <[REDACTED]>, Hurmat Ahmed <[REDACTED]>

this is orgasmically exciting. Thanks everyone for sharing all this stuff.

Peripherally, this conversation also opens up discourse on the idea of "labour"..... in praise of idleness, the right to be lazy, the marxist texts and the critiques of these.... I also have somewhere a lovely conversation on "work" and creativity.. by alain badiou... I think its him..

[Quoted text hidden]

Hurmat Ahmed <[REDACTED]>

Sun, May 27, 2012 at 3:49 PM

To: Huma Mulji <[REDACTED]>

Cc: Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]>, Mehreen Murtaza <[REDACTED]>, Ayesha Jatoi <[REDACTED]>, Rabbya Naseer <[REDACTED]>, Saira Sheikh <[REDACTED]>

This is awesome, I am super excited we are doing this.... Its pretty late and I have just only reached back to isloo. I absolutely loved what I saw at the gallery today, its very exciting the way this show is coming together. I wish I could be part of it physically. But as far as this reading list goes, this is a fab idea, one ought to do it every time which unfortunately almost never happens.

Sadia's reference to Bourriard's "Relational Aesthetics" reminds me of Irit Rogoff's WE: Collectivities, Mutualities, Participations.

History will repeat itself: Strategies of Re enatment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance
 agora8.org contemporary art histories from Eastern Europe. Time - Based

And finally keeping in mind Rabbya and my piece: How to explain a Performance if you weren't there by Rogrigo Tisi.

[Quoted text hidden]

Invitation / EXHIBITION WITHOUT OBJECTS / DELHI

Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]>

Mon, Nov 5, 2012 at 5:19 PM

To: Ayaz Jokhio <[REDACTED]>

Dear Ayaz,

Just wanting to touch base again - I think you are back in Lahore and need to chat with you regarding your participation in the exhibition asap. Please email me your phone number as it will be easier to talk - I am in NYC so cannot meet in Lahore right now.
 Hope you're well.

Best,
 Sadia

[Quoted text hidden]

Ayaz Jokhio <[REDACTED]>

Wed, Nov 21, 2012 at 12:14 AM

To: Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]>

Dear Sadia,

Things are getting crazy here. I am shifting my studio to another place, working on a few applications and a new project for a solo next year... and then BNU is also there.

I am sorry for my laziness in replying you, though I have read and re-read your invitation letter. I think I find it too hi-tech to think about giving it a try, I am quite ignorant about computers. Have never made any power-point presentation myself. But these are just excuses. If I get down to work I can do that... but again that will be double the work.

My mobile is: [REDACTED]

Ayaz

[Quoted text hidden]

Sadia Shirazi <[REDACTED]>

Sat, Dec 22, 2012 at 6:25 PM

To: Ayaz Jokhio <[REDACTED]>

Dear Ayaz,

I am writing to request your permission to use our email correspondences for a publication for the next SARAI READER (Projections). I am writing about *Exhibition Without Objects* for the reader and instead of writing a traditional essay I am using my email correspondence with the artists in the exhibition, with Khoj, and the Indian Consulate (visa issues), etc.

The reason I am interested in including our correspondence is because it points to a way in which the exhibition has a moment of "failure". I think your response was a valid and honest one. It also gives greater transparency into the fact that the exhibition will appeal more to some people depending on their work/practice. I am always interested in the way in which the choices are made in the exhibition, both from the curator but also from the artist. So your email to me is really important in this regard.

I would love to include the emails with your permission. I will also black out your email address so that it remains private. I can also black out your name if you prefer, even.

Let me know either way, and sorry to rush you but a quick response would be greatly appreciated - I'm late in submitting the piece.

India Visa Notification - Application Received

Travisa Outsourcing

notification@travisaoutsourcing.com <notification@travisaoutsourcing.com>

Fri, Oct 5, 2012 at 3:13 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Dear SADIA SHIRAZI,

Travisa Outsourcing has received your application (# [REDACTED]) for an Indian visa. You applied for a Tourist Visa. Requested duration of visa is 5 Years (60 Months) Multiple Entry. We have processed your payment, and will submit your application to the Indian Embassy/Consulate shortly.

Fees were charged accordingly:

Consular Fee	Processing Service Fee	Total
\$153.00	\$13.00	\$166.00

Your payment receipt is detailed below:

Payment Amount: \$166.00

Payment Type: Cash

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Please take a moment to complete a survey on your experience with the visa application process. Your comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated.

India Visa Application - Status Update

Travisa Outsourcing

notification@travisaoutsourcing.com <notification@travisaoutsourcing.com>

Mon, Dec 17, 2012 at 9:03 AM

To: [REDACTED]

Dear SADIA SHIRAZI,

Your application for an India visa is still in process at the Consulate. We are continuing to check with the Consulate, and at this time, your application is currently awaiting approval. Please be aware that we are working every day to make sure that your application process is not delayed.

Please do not call us regarding your status since Travisa Outsourcing doesn't make the decision regarding your visa. We will update the status online once the Indian Consulate makes a decision.

We will send a notification by email once a final decision has been reached.

For your reference, your Application Id is [REDACTED]

Sincerely,
Travisa Outsourcing

This is an automatically generated email. Do NOT reply. All inquiries should be directed at the appropriate office on our contact us page.

Please take a moment to complete a survey on your experience with the visa application process. Your comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated.



'Exhibition Without Objects' Installation View
PHOTO COURTESY: ASIF KHAN, 2012



Deinstall, Saira Sheikh
PHOTO COURTESY: JULIUS JOHN, 2012



'Exhibition Without Objects' Public Programme
PHOTO COURTESY: JULIUS JOHN, 2012

Note

'136 MB/Exhibition Without Objects' (EWO) shifts attention away from the singular art object and focuses instead on artistic practice, discourse and display. The daily presence of Pakistan in international news headlines has resulted in a commensurate focus on its art and culture, albeit one that is reductionist and essentialising. Within Pakistan, in contrast, a productive critical discourse has emerged on artwork that serves to represent the region abroad. This exhibition creates an alternative platform for artists to reflect upon the relationship between their artistic practices and issues of representation, production and display at both a local and global level.

EWO is an unfolding of an initial conversation that began with a letter of invite from the curator to the artist. In lieu of showcasing art objects, the artists were asked to create digital narratives that played with the ubiquitous PowerPoint format that is often used to show an artist's work to critics, curators and colleagues alike. In addition, each artist has paired their PowerPoint with an 'event' that further interrogates or explicates the themes introduced by their

respective slide show. These events ranged from performance and sound installation to casual conversation, and function as catalysts – transforming the gallery from a more passive space of display into an activated space of display and discourse. The first iteration of the exhibition, 136 MB/EWO at The Drawing Room in Lahore (2012), included the artists Ayesha Jatoi, Mehreen Murtaza, Rabbya Naseer & Hurmat Ul Ayn, and Saira Sheikh. 136 MB refers to the file size of the entire show. 230 MB/EWO took place at Khoj International Artists' Association in New Delhi (2013) and included two additional artists, Seher Shah and Iqbal Geoffrey. The exhibition will continue travelling to Mumbai, Karachi and finally, Dubai.

EWO is a dynamic exhibition platform that will transform as it moves through cities along its designated route, growing to include artists from the cities it visits. The exhibition's "Calendar of Events" also adapts to each new site and context. The show has been designed so that it travels the world solely on a hard drive. It is only a compilation of data and then, at each site, bodies and events that are site specific.

THE FIRST KURDISH CINEMA CONFERENCE AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

Ali F. Sengul

While being politically fragmented has been a problem for the Kurds, one wonders if this multicultural existence as a result of the political fragmentation – Kurds living in the ‘four parts’ and those living in the diaspora, this state of double-spiritedness – would allow Kurds to give the world a ‘new cinematic language’. In fact, the main premise of the conference is the possibility of a ‘new cinematic language’... This language will be more universal and it will save us from the language of provincial broken cinema that has been imposed upon us.

Kemal Yıldızhan, Moderator, ‘Six Films, Six Geographies’
International Kurdish Cinema Conference, Diyarbakir, 2009

The provincial ‘broken cinema’ to which Yıldızhan refers is the Turkish national cinema and its representation of minorities in inferior and primitive roles. As part of an attempt to search for an alternative poetics of a Kurdish cinema and to ask whether a Kurdish cinema exists and how it could be defined, the first, and so far the only, international Kurdish cinema conference, ‘Six Films, Six Geographies’, convened in the city of Diyarbakir in Turkey in 2009, bringing together Kurdish directors from different parts of the world. Although during the last decade several Kurdish film festivals have been organised in different world capitals such as London, Paris, New York, Melbourne, Montreal, Berlin and Vienna, the Diyarbakir conference was the first occasion for Kurdish directors, critics and a large audience to share an organised platform to discuss ‘Kurdish Cinema’. Discussions during the conference coalesced around the question of whether Kurdish cinema would be defined as a national cinema (contributing to, and an important part of, ongoing national struggle), or

as part of transnational cinemas (diasporic, exilic, global art, etc.). The discussions were surely marked by the location of the conference and the positions inhabited by the audience members, as well as the filmmakers. Hosted by the pro-Kurdish Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality, the festival was held in Diyarbakir, a location that has been the centre of Kurdish politics in Turkey since the 1960s and the epicentre of urban warfare between the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) and the Turkish army during the long 1990s. As its location and institutional backing attest, the conference was endorsed by the Kurdish movement in Turkey. That it would be marked by the involvement of the state security apparatus at several stages was already expected, yet what was surprising at the inaugural conference was the disagreement between the filmmakers and the audience over the definitions of, and the future directions for, a Kurdish cinema. This disagreement can be interpreted through the differential spatial experience of the filmmakers and the audience, and the assumed

political function each side ascribed to film production. The aesthetic and political sensibilities of the directors, mostly living in diaspora in Europe, had been shaped by their *deterritorialised* existence and participation in transnational cinema culture, whereas the Diyarbakirite audience grew up and is politically socialised within the Kurdish *national* struggle for *territorial* rights.¹

Since the start of the war in 1984, the population of the city increased exponentially due to rapid urban migration as a result of the systematic destruction of Kurdish villages as part of the war. The traumas of war combined with factors such as overpopulation, petty crime and other markers of urban degeneration affected the shape of political culture within the city. On the other hand, the directors attending the conference were either from outside Turkey or had left Turkey before the spread of the war to urban centres in the Kurdish region. Miraz Bezar and Yüksel Yavuz left in the early 1980s and currently live in Germany. Hiner Saleem and Hisam Zaman are both from 'Iraqi Kurdistan', the former living in France and the latter in Norway. None of the attending directors whose films were shown experienced the ongoing war between the PKK and the Turkish army in the region, nor were they part of the political socialisation process in the Kurdish region of Turkey in the 1990s.

Instead of forcing Kurdish cinema into either a 'national/territorial' or a 'transnational/deterritorialised' cinematic aesthetic, the Kurdish experience and its cinematic reflection can be used to problematise the dichotomous ordering of national and transnational. Indeed, the disagreement, while decisive throughout the conference, can be seen as a way of negotiating an aesthetics for a Kurdish cinema to exist. The content of the negotiation was whether this new cinema can accommodate both being a part of a national – spatio-political – struggle (both the directors and the audience concur on the political nature of making films on Kurds) and at the same time appropriate a more deterritorialised cinematic language without fetishising the national self. For the directors, the

spatial politics is of prime importance, and by being a part of a conference taking place in this particular city, they showed their position vis-à-vis the Kurdish 'national' struggle, yet they resisted the idea of making films only for/about Kurds and the 'struggle'. Bezar, while his first feature-length film is about the effects of war on the city of Diyarbakir during the long 1990s, stated that his films might best be considered as part of diaspora cinema. Hisham Zaman stated that as a Kurd from Iraq, making films on Kurds is important for him, yet, living in Norway, it is not the only subject through which his films engage with issues of identity and belonging.

On the National and Transnational in Cinema Studies

The disagreement, while informed by the context of the festival, is not specific to the conference and should be read as a symptom of a larger methodological problem that inflicts debates on 'national' and 'transnational' cinemas. Within recent cinema studies literature, transnationality has been defined as a post-national moment during which the classical rubrics that used to define national cinemas – language, culture, identity, industry, state subsidy – are no longer functional at the national level. As part of globalisation and the organisation of capital at a global level through border-evading, transnational movements of people, technologies and films themselves, the transnational cinema framework defines the post-national politics and aesthetics of film productions by voluntarily as well as involuntarily deterritorialised filmmakers. My point of entry into the national-transnational cinema debate is through the

The Kurdish experience and its cinematic reflection can be used to problematise the dichotomous ordering of national and transnational.

definition of 'nation' in both frameworks. Although in cinema studies, national and transnational are used dichotomously, both frameworks define 'nation' through national sovereignty in the form of the nation-state. The argument that 'nations' are losing their ontological and epistemological currency in cinema studies in favour of larger scales is due to the definition of nation as nation-state.² There has been a shift away from the study of national cinemas towards regional, transnational cinemas and world cinema, yet, in the literature, 'national cinema' is still reserved for the cinemas of nations with states, excluding the cinemas of non-state nations like the Kurds.³ Here, however, I will not claim nationality for Kurdish cinema – or for other non-state cinemas – although this would be the desire behind the Kurdish political movement, due to the affective resemblance between a national cinema and a nation-state. Instead, I aim to use the Kurdish case to problematise the identity of nation and state within the literature.⁴ Beyond the national vs. transnational (read also as territorialisation vs. deterritorialisation) dichotomy retained in most literature on non-Hollywood cinemas, Kurdish cinema can open the possibility of defining nation (national cinema) not through statehood and national space, but as a transnational critique of the nation-state and its spatial techniques. In this way, we can redefine transnationality not as a post-national moment (referring to the waning of national borders), but as an aesthetico-political moment where nation can be defined outside the nation-state by problematising but at the same time strategically appropriating deterritorialisation as an ethico-political stance against state sovereignty. In the case of Kurdish cinema, this cannot be better seen than through the analysis of 'Kurdistan' as cinematic space in Kurdish films. The opening remarks by Yıldızhan speak to the spatial imaginary of Kurdish cinema. Although Kurdistan is at the centre of the Kurdish movement and of Kurdish films, I argue that as a cinematic space it does not correspond to a nationality sealed with borders: it is rendered visible only through other national borders –

Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria – crisscrossing and dividing it into four parts.⁵

What makes theorising Kurdistan as a cinematic space both difficult and necessary is its centrality in the Kurdish national movement and its fragmented cinematic visibility. For the diaspora filmmakers, the existence of a national attachment to Kurdistan is mediated by this already fragmented spatiality. This relationship prevents the filmmakers' attachment from being nostalgic: nostalgia for a nation/home left behind. The borders crisscrossing this spatiality haunt an otherwise unproblematic attachment to a coherent nation-space as home. What happens instead is that the filmmakers through their films *claim* this particular spatiality as Kurdistan. Hence, the mode of attachment on the part of the directors is not 'longing', but an active claim. Yet this claim is not for a national space – or the state. On the contrary, in the films shown during the conference, the national space is made visible through the violent mechanisms embodying it, such as land mines, barbed wires, and border patrols. This mode of critical engagement in national space precludes the possibility of imagining Kurdistan as yet another national space. Instead, the production of the space of Kurdistan is made possible through the non-violent agencies of its characters. The films deny violence – even what can be deemed revolutionary violence – to their characters. However, the characters are not represented as the victims of state violence: they gain their visibility and subjectivity not through victimhood, but through disengaging themselves from violence. Gulistan in *Min Dît* and Alişan in *Press* refuse to use violence even when they have the opportunity. *Yol* (*The Road*, 1982) by Şerif Gören was the first film in which Kurdistan entered the space of Turkish cinema. I suggest that the film introduced Kurdistan as a 'supplement' through deconstructive politics to problematise national space as presence, rather than offer Kurdistan as positivity (read as nation-space). In the film, the visibility of Kurdistan works only through this deconstructive function.



Yol (The Road):
The place name hovers
over the road in lieu of
a road sign

Yol and 'Kurdistan' as Supplement: The Space of Kurdish Cinema

Yol was a turning point in cinema in Turkey in terms of its configuration of cinematic space. The film not only produced an uncompromising critique of the repressive state apparatuses within the Kurdish region in Turkey, but also diverged from the national cartography of cinematic space for the first time by introducing 'Kurdistan' as a new cinematic space. The film follows five prison inmates en route to their hometowns in the Kurdish region during a national holiday break. As they travel through the national landscape, the film shows the road signs of the cities they pass. Finally, when the bus is driving one of the inmates, Ömer, through the city of Urfa, located at the western border of the Kurdish region, we see the inter-title 'Kurdistan,' superimposed upon the landscape. The Kurdistan 'sign' was added by Yılmaz Güney during the editing process in Europe,⁶ but was excised from the versions released in Turkey.⁷ Güney's *cinemato-graphing*

of the political space redraws the map of the region where the film takes place in accordance with Ömer's politico-cognitive attachment. This authorial supplement refers, for the first time, to a discrepancy between the national cartography and cinematic space.

The new cartography, however, does not work out in Ömer's favour. His happy and excited face when he gets off the bus and steps into the middle of a vast landscape quickly turns to fear as he gets closer to his village, where the sound of automated machine guns becomes audible. The nearer he gets to his village, the more frequently the gunshots explode. This short-lived excitement and sense of freedom disappear as he reaches the outskirts of his village, which, as he soon figures out, is surrounded by the gendarmerie in search of smugglers. Ömer could enter the village only after all smugglers surrender after a fierce shootout. The operation against the smugglers on the mountains continues the entire night. The next day, the gendarmerie brings the

dead bodies of the smugglers for identification; although Ömer's brother is among them, he cannot yet claim the body for fear of retaliation. In the end, he is seen riding his horse along with other smugglers to the mountains outside the village.

Though *Yol* has been frequently commented upon by critics and scholars, the part where Güney inserted the sign 'Kurdistan', has been missed – or skipped – within these comments. This lack of scholarly attention may be partly due to the excision of the part in the 'Turkish' version, yet in the few comments that do refer to it, it is dismissed as being not part of the original film but added as an afterthought by Güney. But if a film is finalised during the editing process, when all its parts are assembled, the dichotomy between what constitutes original and what addition becomes problematic. We can even argue that, since the film was only supervised by Güney from prison and was directed by his assistant, the 'addition' is Güney's only directorial imprint. Yet in discrediting the 'addition', there is more at stake than the film and its truth-value. What makes the sign inferior to, and less original than, the rest of the film, is the pre-conviction of the commenter on what he considers original: the national territory. We can make sense of this hierarchy of original/addition within the cartography of the film (the very position of the extra footage, the 'excess' within 'the reel') only in connection with the national cartography (the truth-value of its map and Kurdistan as 'addition'): the belief in the national territory and the disbelief in what the sign refers to – Kurdistan. The 'real' cartography here determines the

limit of cinematic space. There is also the itinerary of the film's completion process. In order to finish the film, Güney fled Turkey to Switzerland where he was 'present' during the editing process. His absence from Turkey made the completion of the film possible. However, to understand this arbitrary original vs. addition debate, one can claim from the perspective of Derrida that the sign works as the "supplement" to national cartography as 'presence'. In discussing Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work on 'writing' as a destruction of the presence constituted in speech, Derrida employs Rousseau's oft-used term 'supplement' to deconstruct this and other dichotomies of absence and presence (original and addition) in his texts through recourse to its double meaning as a.) an addition to something already complete and b.) as substituting a lack, thereby completing what is already claimed as complete. Kurdistan as 'sign' within the film's cartography and Kurdistan as geography, taken as 'supplement' or "exterior addition" (p. 145), may be regarded as serving to give completion – only in the sense of providing the complete picture of what constitutes 'national territory' as presence. While the film was shown 'outside' Turkey, and Güney received the Cannes award for it in France, it was banned – absent – in Turkey until the late 1990s. When it was finally shown in Turkey, the absence of the sign further revealed the complicity of the geography of exhibition and its cartographic determinants, as well as the geography of the film. The comments on originality within the film suggest that the limit of the originality of *the film as it could be shown in Turkey* constitutes its overall authenticity. The film, however, problematises the arbitrary equivalency of the geography of exhibition (its authenticity depending on what can be shown in a particular place) and the geography within the film (both the sign as place and as extra footage). Variably, the film becomes complete either through the excision of the part, which is exactly what happened during the public screenings in Turkey, or through that part that is deemed as addition, as supplement.

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Kurdish Cinema: Towards a Non-violent Cartography?

The persistence of Kurdistan as a discursive space and the impossibility of imagining it as a homogenous nation-space, and moreover the exclusion of a nostalgic attachment to it, is negotiated within Kurdish films through certain sites. These are iconographic sites produced at the intersection of the violent spatial techniques of the state and the tactics of the inhabitants. *Press* (Sedat Yılmaz, 2010) and *Min Dît* (*Before Your Eyes*, 2009) by Miraz Bezar take place within the city of Diyarbakır in the most intense period of urban warfare during the mid-1990s. In *Press*, which is about the well-known pro-Kurdish daily *Özgür Gündem* (*Independent Agenda*), the journalists, with the help of the local populace, form a newspaper distribution network in the city to evade the incursions of the security forces. Despite constant attacks, the editor of the daily forbids the journalists from carrying guns, even for self-defence. In *Min Dît*, the use of the prohibited Kurdish language is part of the production of space in the city by the Kurdish characters; the security forces, on the other hand, use only Turkish. It is heard very early in the film, immediately before 10-year-old Gulistan's parents are shot dead by the police officers who stopped them in their car for interrogation. When Gulistan later sees her parents' murderer in the city, she works out a plan to avenge their death. Instead of killing the police officer with his gun, which she has stolen from his apartment, she distributes in his neighbourhood a flyer she prepares that explains, with his photograph, his real occupation as assassin.

Ax (*The Earth*, 1999) by Kazım Öz takes place during the same period in a village evacuated by Turkish security forces to fight the PKK. In the film, the old Zelo, the only one left, remembers through flashbacks the village's inhabitants before the evacuation. The juxtaposition of how the village previously was and how it now is provides testimony to the catastrophic effects of state-spatial practices in the region. Bahman Ghobadi's films take place on the borders of Turkey,

Iran and Iraq to depict the fragmented existence of Kurdish space; they deal with families whose lives are divided by borders they must cross to stay alive. *Zamani Barayé Masti Asbha* (*A Time for Drunken Horses*, 2000) tells the story of orphaned siblings taken care of by the oldest brother who has to do border smuggling across the heavily mined Iran-Iraq border. *Niwemang* (*Half Moon*, 2006) is about a family of Kurdish musicians trying to cross into Iraq to perform at a concert celebrating the fall of Saddam Hussain. *Gomgashtei dar Aragh* (*Marooned in Iraq*, 2002) is about an old musician who wants to cross the border into Iraq to see his dying ex-wife.

Conclusion

The attachment to a national struggle while simultaneously sustaining a critique of the production of nation-space informs the deterritorialised cinematic aesthetic of Kurdish directors. The spatial claim together with the deterritorialised ethical commitment may provide a corrective to the dichotomously situated national-transnational frameworks by showing how they are not only not in binary opposition – both take national sovereignty for granted – but the processes embodying them may be mutually productive. To cinema studies works which equate the 'national' with stasis and the 'transnational' with (post-national) mobility the study of Kurdish cinema brings the possibility of thinking of 'the national' outside state-sovereignty, as a transnational ethico-political engagement. This critical position is a main condition of possibility for the existence of a Kurdish cinema as 'national'. ■

Notes

- 1 **Min Dît** [*Before Your Eyes*] (2009) by Miraz Bezar, an account of the war-torn city of Diyarbakır during the 1990s from the perspective of two kids whose parents are assassinated by the secret police, was criticised by the audience for misrepresenting the political 'facts' of the decade, and for being unable to capture the 'revolutionary atmosphere' in the city during the 1990s.

Kilometre Zero (2005) by Hiner Saleem was dismissed due to its mixed-up linguistic map of 'Kurdistan'. The film is about an Iraqi Kurd, Ako, who is enrolled in the Iraqi army and assigned to drive a martyred fellow-Kurdish soldier across the Turkish border. The audience reacted to Ako's Kurmanci dialect, claiming he would be more appropriately represented if he spoke in Sorani, a dialect spoken in the Kurdish region in Iraq.

- 2 The edited volume, **The Cinema of Small Nations**, by Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie is a recent example of defining national cinemas in terms of cinemas of nation-states.
- 3 We can add to the list Palastinian cinema (Dabashi, Tawil), Quebecois cinema (Marshall) and Basque cinema (Marti-Olivella). The problematic definitions of national cinema aside, being a part of Westphalian system is required for films to attend international film festivals when the nationality of a director is not in sync with his/her national identity. For a discussion of the cartography of international film festivals and Palestinian filmmakers' terms of presence in it, see Dabashi.
- 4 The issue of sovereignty is not the only modality through which 'transnational' studies deal with 'nationality.' In critical transnational studies, the homogenising and reductive premise of national identity – and the importance of studying the sub-national as well as the supra national identities of class, gender and minority – became points of intervention. While I attend to this line of inquiry, here I am interested in the primacy of 'national' struggle in the Kurdish context. Post-nationality, both in the sense of a waning of national borders and a critical methodology of studying other identities, is not able to explain the persistence of national struggles. The contemporary national struggles, mediated by transnationality, may critically avoid state nationalism.
- 5 In **Klamek Ji Bo Beko [A Song For Beko]** (1992) by Nizametting Arıç, a German émigré from Turkey, Beko's brother, just about to leave Turkey to avoid compulsory military service, explains to him a map he draws on the ground of how he would navigate his way out of Turkey to the south. While the map is supposed to be Kurdistan's, it only shows the borders he has to move across within Kurdistan to reach the Kurdish guerillas.
- 6 The film is directed by Güney's assistant Serif Goren, based on the meticulously detailed shooting script written by Güney himself in prison. After the completion of the production process, Güney escaped Turkey with the footage and the post-production was completed in Sweden.
- 7 I have reached three different copies of the film. One is the version released outside Turkey with English subtitles and retaining the 'Kurdistan' sign. Another shows the city of 'Urfa-Siverek' instead of Kurdistan. In the DVD version released in Turkey, neither the Kurdistan sign nor Urfa-Siverek appears.
- 8 Jacques Derrida. **Of Grammatology** (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, Baltimore), p. 142.

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LANDING IMAGINARIES

AN INTERVIEW WITH GEETA KAPUR

Sabih Ahmed

Sabih Ahmed (SA): *Geeta, you have had a long-sustained belief in vanguardism in the sphere of cultural production. The question of context becomes crucial here because it is the milieu in which an avant-garde (or even an interventionist) mandate is proposed. Can you tell us how you view Art in relation to social configurations and political impulses?*

Geeta Kapur (GK): The first part of your question is about vanguardism and the historical context. In the early 20th century, the term ‘vanguard’ referred literally to the advanced contingent of revolutionary forces: this would be the proletariat but it could be, quite paradoxically, the intelligentsia as well, so long as it aligned with the Communist Party. Vanguardism as the exercise of agency for and on behalf of the people is a political proposition which has been critiqued over a whole century for its futuristic hubris. We have to see the concept of the avant-garde as derived from this but adapted by artists’ movements at the historical juncture of a revolution – to cohere allegiance and autonomy in the practice of art.

The historical avant-garde of the 1920s set out to do that. So while this entire discourse starts with the political proposition of the vanguard in Soviet Russia, the avant-garde is a deferred achievement. It comes to fruition as an *agential* force within art – it deflects the definitional context of the vanguard and presses on to define a linguistic field. From there the artist maps imaginary structures onto the future.

Here, then, we are talking first of the context, the *historical context*, which produced the vanguard impulse. But when we go on to speak of the artistic avant-garde, we are talking about the autonomy that art asserts in relationship

to the historical context. The practice of art is derived from the context and also contests the hegemonic powers of any contextual order. Let us not, then, speak of context in purely sociological terms – by plotting societal parameters, and deriving from these the ethics and ideology of art – the kind of sociology that enumerates or inventorises the social *condition* and emphasises political and moral responsibility.

I want to make a distinction from a sociological use of the word ‘context’, though I did use it in that sense in the 1970s. But even back then, it came not so much from sociology as from Marxist art historians who used sociological paradigms – classically, Arnold Hauser and T.J. Clark. Or writers who related sociology and culture, like Lucien Goldmann, Henri Lefebvre and Raymond Williams. These major figures transmuted Marxist sociology and its ideology critique into cultural and then art historical discourse, and changed the terms of that discipline to radical ends. But even that idea of context has been problematised by critical discourse since Foucault, and asks in a sense to be deconstructed. Now the claim to individual agency in the act of using language, in the act of enunciation, leads simultaneously to deeper entrapment in political systems and cultural histories but also deferred freedoms through a keenly probed subjectivity.

SA: *I find that you deliberately posit a necessary urgency to ‘historical context’ in your writing, which seems to qualify the idea of context in particular ways. Can you please tell me more about what specifically you mean by ‘historical context’ and the agency of individuals in it?*

GK: *Historical context* will require a *de-inventorizing* of social conditions. As I said above, it is my intention to enrich and complicate the notion of context by introducing the issue of subjective agency. On the one hand, the context interpellates the subject. On the other hand, subjects interpolate themselves into contexts through psychic manoeuvres and blast these open. Take for instance an artist-filmmaker like Ritwik Ghatak who, I suggest in my essay on his last film, *Jukti Takko ar Gappo*,¹ addresses history as an inveterate player: as the subject in, and the subject of, history. He inducts himself into history by biographical means. What we have here is a subjectivity *acted out* on the screen, and in this excessive act, the historical is enunciated, it is addressed and brought to a tragic denouement.

Agency comes to life when a problematic is posed. The problematic may be tackled in a purely discursive mode or, being historically located, it may have to be worked through contextual manoeuvres. What the ‘problematic’ means for me is that contradictions are duly acknowledged. These are historical contradictions in the Marxist sense, but also in other senses. Contradictions abide in the psychic structure – so I am interested in how contradictions are lived through existentially, even as they are lived out in the social field, in history. There is a relay of meanings between the fact of contradiction, the posing of the problematic, and the dialectic, which is an agential form of thinking and of being in the world. Perhaps we can also reverse this geometry. It is the exercise of agency that is able to locate a problematic produced by contradictions; it is that which galvanises a dialectic, and the agential impulse completes itself through historical change.

SA: *One may say that we can write about contexts and, separately, that we write in a context. It is a certain attitude to history, where location and being positioned somewhere is of utmost importance. With Ghatak, you spoke about how subjectivities are interpellated by history, but also interpolate history. In such a formulation, is there such a*

thing as a para-context? A position beyond or above context?

GK: To take up your question on ‘writing about contexts’ – all retrospective writing is about contexts, and that is a perfectly legitimate and honourable activity. All historians write about contexts. But when you speak about writing from within a context, i.e., *in context*, we are obviously speaking of the contemporary. I would add that we are then speaking of contemporaneity as an *incontrovertible* time-space but also as an *elected* proposition. It is inevitable that I speak from within the terms of the contemporary because this is where I stand. But there is also a chosen positionality, a partisan stance. Within the terms of contemporaneity, you make choices which pronounce your partisanship to this or that historical tendency.

To restate this: contemporaneity is a *conjunctural* phenomenon. It is a coming together of certain historical forces at a certain moment. It is temporal-spatial, it is here and now. The forces at play are conjunctural, and standing within that force-field, one makes choices – of being in history and of projecting options beyond history into the future. There is the pull of belonging, the importance of *being there*; and of projecting, of producing prognoses. At that juncture we have produced something like a combustion of the contemporary.

Therefore, I am less interested in the concept of para-context, especially as your formulation of para-context seems to hint at some kind of ahistoricity, of being outside of history. Perhaps you are suggesting that the historical context is a constraining phenomenon, or that it is necessarily hegemonic. But I think that the term can be expanded to gain a dimension that *abuts the contours of the future*.

I used the term ‘combustion’ because it has a transformative aspect.

What combusts will transform. This transformational energy will also, in the long run, produce entropy; its force will disperse.

SA: *Can you elaborate on the 'combustion of the contemporary' you referred to? Much as it sounds like having a propelling force, it also sounds like an evacuation as well.*

GK: I used the term 'combustion' because it has a transformative aspect. What combusts will transform. This transformational energy will also, in the long run, produce entropy; its force will disperse. Ultimately – and this is a cosmological limit – the energy will exhaust itself. Can I extrapolate a bit extravagantly and say what has slowed down becomes the substrate of history, and as substrate it can be mined to fuel new forces in the future.

I think we are always looking for metaphors that amplify the transformative impulse; we hypothesise how these forces proliferate. This word features a lot in my writing because it is crucial to understanding the practice of art, which, at a fundamental level is a trans-formation of the material world.

SA: *Coming to the question of positioning, what are the discursive sites you find yourself and your work inhabiting? You have been someone who has not been embedded in an institution, nor identified yourself as an academic, and neither do you particularly take to being a public intellectual. How do you see your own positioning? In what spaces, what sites?*

GK: My choice of being an independent critic came from recognisable determinants. It came from my education in the United States – I was there, in art school, from 1963 to 1965. The art world at the time produced volatile art critics, they were part of the triumphalism that post-war American art had assumed. Think of Clement Greenberg, Harold

Rosenberg, Max Kozloff and Irving Sandler, who was directly my teacher at New York University. When I returned from the States, I plunged into the Indian art world, made friendships and alliances with artists much senior to me but also with my peers. I literally embraced the bohemia (and the bonhomie) of studios, exhibitions, travels – of vagabonding. At this time, the more rigorous modernist definition of artist identity took off into freer assertions of autonomy, subjectivity, eccentricity and even what one might call anarchic sociality – just map the relay from [F.N.] Souza to [Jagdish] Swaminathan. There was an intense identification with the artist as *practitioner*. I too privileged practice. In doing so, I did not subordinate myself to the artist's practice, I tried to develop a practice of my own which would stand side-by-side with the artist's practice. This was not of course a unique ambition in the 1960s. Think of Richard Bartholomew and his role as critic.

While the 60s aura-tized the artist to a high degree, it also produced the need for interpretation which was more than an explication of artworks. This turn was reinforced by my postgraduate thesis at the Royal College of Art in London, where I had as my guide and mentor the redoubtable Peter de Francia who taught me to *think* art. I was there in 1968-69 – such years! I learnt to engage and interpret and to prognosticate. This came from a desire to intervene here and now; and it came also from a retrospective act: you re-read, annotate and pull certain practices into the present and extrapolate further. Engage, interpret, intervene, and *act partisan*. These are, I suppose, my keywords as a critic!

I sought meaning in artists' studios. In the 1960s and 70s, and even the 80s, the studio was an *adda* but also a learning place for both artists and critics. Today, studio visits by critics and curators seem to be more instrumenatilsed. If I went to Tyeb Mehta or Sudhir Patwardhan's studio, dialogue would be long and leisurely, it could also acquire high intensity. At a slightly more formal level, we had dialogues in workshop conditions as at Kasauli, where artists would work in their make-shift studios and in the evenings gather to drink

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and discuss a selected artist's work through slideshows. Institutionally, the Lalit Kala Akademi offered some opportunities for seminars, and the two good art schools, Baroda and Santiniketan, taught art history and encouraged certain forms of criticality.

The Fine Arts Faculty in Baroda was the most generative space for art discourse at the time. I visited and also lived on and off in Baroda through the 70s and 80s, and although we didn't have formalised reading circles, there was a brimming think-tank with [K.G.] Subramanyan, [Ghulam Mohammed] Sheikh, Bhupen [Khakhar], Vivan [Sundaram] as hubs. There was also Jeram Patel and Nasreen [Mohamed], and there were visiting professors, among them Timothy Hyman and even, for a brief stint, our teacher of all teachers, Peter de Francia. During the same years, the Kasauli Art Centre was at its most active. For me, as also for my peers, Kasauli and Baroda were conjoined. Out of this *frisson* came the 1981 exhibition, 'Place for People'. Then, in 1982, in collaboration with Marxist friends from across several fields, the *Journal of Arts and Ideas* was launched. You can judge the nature of the dialogue from these two events. With the Sahmat platform emerging in 1989, the contestations became overtly political, and for the first time, it became possible to envisage forms of praxis through being a critic.

Parallely, I had gained access to more developed discursive spaces, such as the Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS) in Shimla. As a Visiting Fellow during the 1970s, I was in the midst of very senior thinkers and had to gather courage to even attend such advanced discourse in the humanities and social sciences. I was 23 then, and I became a very diligent listener – people comment how I wear a frown of anxious concentration when I am in a seminar to this day! At the Institute, the first distinguished Director of the IIAS was the historian (also art historian) Dr Nihar Ranjan Ray. During my stint in the 1970s, the anthropologist Dr S.C. Dube was Director. Here, culture was duly problematised while art history and art were just about inferred. Yet I would say that

*Contemporary Indian Artists*² was honed in this intellectual setting. Almost 10 years later, in 1985, I gained a fellowship at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) in Delhi. By now, I could be more participative, and I intervened in the dialogues conducted under the generous mandate of the historian Dr Ravinder Kumar. It is through that intensive exchange, those relentless seminars and cafeteria dialogues, that I gained impetus for my second book, *When Was Modernism*. These were definitive years, and NMML was at that time a peak site for discourse. I was thoroughly immersed – and I must add that for those five years, I interacted much less with artists, went much less to the studios...

SA: *What has been the nature of partisanship in these phases?*

GK: In the 1960s, I began with absolute regard for the older generation of Indian artists, the erstwhile Bombay Progressives and their circles of affiliates. Their preference for Paris and London had given way to New York (think of the changes in the work of Souza, Subramanyan, Tyeb), and they could be placed in the international domain of abstract expressionism. I had seen Pop arrive in New York, and as it happened, my generation in Baroda, Bhupen foremost, was looking askance at the modernist modes of earlier generations. I was torn, and tried to reach out both ways.

This double reach remained productive: *Contemporary Indian Artists* included four older artists – [M.F.] Husain, Souza, Ram Kumar and [Akbar] Padamsee – and two younger (Swaminathan and Bhupen); my first curated exhibition, 'Pictorial Space',³ included at least two generations; but in 1981, for the 'Place for People'⁴ catalogue, I wrote an assertive essay with and for my peers (titled "Partisan Views about the Human Figure"). In the 1982 Festival of India exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, London,⁵ which I co-curated with [Richard] Bartholomew and Padamsee, we again included at least two active generations of artists. But on my suggestion, these were divided into two parts. The first consisted of artists in the modernist mode. The second

was figurative-narrative as determined by 'Place for People'. By articulating this turn internationally and up-front, I made my partisanship obvious. But I must add that already by 1989-90, figurative-narrative art seemed to need critical self-reflexion – and this was induced among other factors by the critique mounted by the young Radicals of Kerala.⁶ Through the 1990s, I turned towards art that deployed new forms both at a material and conceptual level: especially installation art, then photography, video and performance art as these developed in India. For this reason, my subsequent curating projects were decidedly heterogeneous in genre and medium. I refer to the co-curated 'Bombay-Mumbai' in the multi-part exhibition, 'Century City', at the Tate Modern in 2001, and 'subTerrain' at the House of World Cultures in Berlin in 2003.⁷

SA: *If the artist's studio is a site of meaning-making, how does it work when you encounter works of artists from other parts of the world with whom you do not have that studio relation?*

GK: Yes, I should mention that from the late 1980s, international travel became frequent – besides Europe and the States, I travelled in loops to the Soviet Union and Cuba, Australia, Africa, Venezuela, Indonesia, China, Iran and, much later, Mexico. There were no studio visits possible, and travel was related to exhibitions and conferences. The sites of discourse and the nature of debate were 'agonistic'. Perhaps much of this came to a culmination in the later essays of *When was Modernism*, published in 2000.

So when I say that I'm eliciting, imposing, intervening in an art work, I am serving myself. I am making sense of the world in which the art object affords a form of mediation – the subjectivity and consciousness of the artist is transfigured inside me as inside a bristling cocoon!

SA: *Your framework as an art critic has relied a lot on interpretation: that there is an object of study from which will unravel a set of meanings. What is the relationship of meanings and the object-of-study for you? Are meanings deciphered and elicited? Or are they imposed upon, i.e., are they projected upon the object for you? Or, are they adjacent? Perhaps annotative?*

GK: I think that by the act of separating these aspects, you've suggested that all of these are at play. Deciphering and eliciting have to do with intention, and it re-enforces the perennial desire of the artist – that the critic follow the artist's intention. We know, of course, how this desire is much critiqued! If I retain some aspect of the artist's intentionality in mind, it is because it complements interpretation – but once the latter has been creatively re-positioned by hermeneutics. You elicit in order to annotate, and in that process transform, the meaning of the object. But from interpretation to annotation there is already a form of excess. And as meaning unravels, it could end up both supplementing and undermining the 'original' intention.

The question of imposing and projecting means precisely that I exceed interpretation. Having paid my due respects to the linguistic structure of an artwork, I impose upon it a second, more theoretical frame available to me in the field of discourses – art history, cultural theory, political ideology. Such an imposition is not in any way camouflaged, it is clearly flagged as an intervention into the rightful autonomy of the work.

Total investment in the artist as subject and producer is a fundamental commitment, it is my apprenticeship to art as such. But in the process of interpretation, I become a co-producer of meanings, and then, through disciplinary expansion, I gain critical reflexivity.

SA: *In making that intervention of a discursive imposition, what are the intended effects that you expect of those meanings and those processes of meaning-making at large?*

GK: In answering it, I would like to subvert your question. I will move to what ‘meaning’ *means* to me. There is a kind of functionalist definition of meaning, where one charts the field; there might be an evolutionary idea of meaning whereby *more* meanings accrue. I want to create a form of devolution and arrive at a more existential condition of meaning-making – where one’s very life hangs on that possibility.

So, as much as meaning is a functional attribute of language, it has an existential significance. The only measure of existence is our ability to articulate meaning. I see it as *apprehending* the world, *seizing* it – not just comprehending it through the bind of language. So when I say that I’m eliciting, imposing, intervening in an art work, I am serving myself. I am making sense of the world in which the art object affords a *form* of mediation – the subjectivity and consciousness of the artist is transfigured inside me as inside a bristling cocoon! Cannibalism, incarnation, embodiment – either way, it brings into my existential disposition a *capacity* that is almost as if surreal... The art object is therefore absolutely crucial for me; it is the means through which I prove to myself my own affective existence-presence. There is manic identification that goes beyond the artist and cathects on to the object that is art.

I will make a confession here. My desire for explication and propaganda and therefore communication is ultimately not so acute. I can feel just like the artist who declares herself to be autonomous and engages in producing difficult, even esoteric, art. Partly because I am attached to and uphold the importance of high-art, I feel I am not obliged to propagate art or, for that matter, *text*.

But, then, where is that partisan ‘me’? *This is my aesthetic bind*.

SA: Does context need to be deciphered and interpreted? Is context legible?

GK: Does context need to be legible? In political terms, it is my business to make it legible. In subjective terms, I

see obstruction everywhere, starting from myself – the obstruction that one’s own consciousness brings to the phenomenal world and that which the object-world sets up. Here is a *mise-en-scène* where resistance, not legibility, produces the protagonist. Even while declaring my allegiance to context and making a claim for legibility, I know that my existential being will propose difficulty. I find this contextual and critical obduracy mirrored in the difficulty the artist feels while making art. There is a relationship of these two desires: to make legible, and to admit the illegibility of art’s meaning and thereby *life’s* meaning.

SA: I am interested to know more about the ‘resistance to being made legible’ that you mention, and what it implies to overcome that resistance in the cultural sphere.

GK: Let me signal my response with Adorno’s proposition – that the political force of an artwork is so (deliberately) encoded that its meaning is *not* immediately accessible. Such inaccessibility is for me a sign of the difficulty of living in the world, of deciphering the world. Something so attenuated as an art work cannot be accessible; its linguistic circumstance does not allow for transparency. The work of art is in some ways a microcosmic allegory of the larger world steeped in the difficulty of making meaning. If, let us say, making meaning of the Holocaust is the historical but also paradigmatic problem of Europe, then the meaning that can be attributed to art after the Holocaust cannot be easily accessed. A fraught context produces difficult art – that is why it remains outside the domain of ‘mass culture’ which deals deliberately and in all its flamboyance with a ‘degraded’ aesthetics. To my understanding, the process of (esoteric) encoding serves to generate resistance in several ways at once.

SA: In the last two decades, say since the early 1990s, until the ongoing second decade of 21st century, would you see the discourse around ‘mass culture’ and an emerging

discourse of 'the multitudes' in dialogue with one another in the field of modern art?

GK: Much of recent political theory that is radical owes its allegiance to the 1968 youth 'revolution' – and it emerges as much from its celebration as from disappointment and serves as a critique. In dealing with the persistence of bourgeois-liberal society, now pitched to the logic of capitalist globalisation, this memory and the critique serve to reinvigorate radical movements with divergent agendas. From within that history, take the single figure of Herbert Marcuse (who belongs, somewhat oddly, to the Frankfurt School), and we see a major diversion from the kind of argument I have been making with the help of Adorno. Responding to the radicalism of the 60s, and introducing into the discourse of contemporary culture *utopic possibilities*, Marcuse could be seen to actually address himself to mass culture. He reinscribed the idea of culture within the consciousness of a people, of a democratised polity. Indeed, Marcuse might be seen to be an advanced figure in making available a politics of culture that accompanies and enables large movements for democracy – such that are sympathetic to or supported by, say, Antonio Negri.

However, I'm not in a position to go to the next step and discuss the concept of the multitudes with sufficient rigour. All I might say is that the term can be used rhetorically and thus be placed in opposition to two things: the elite and the vanguard (being advanced, the vanguard is also elite). The term 'multitudes' relates to anarchism, which remains one choice among others within the radical politics of the 20th century. In another aspect, this designation, the 'multitudes', overlaps with 'migrants' – that huge body of suspended identities that come to populate the world in the process of decolonisation. The migrant has both numerically and politically a certain kind of *negative agency* that supports the concept of multitudes. Or, on the other hand, a non-agency, in the shape of the dispossessed migrant. This arouses anguish as well as the impulse to rise, to *become* a dissident force

– the multitudes. The migrant is not consistently graspable – not in terms of a nation-space, not in terms of class, not in terms of cultural attributes like language. The category of the migrant remains volatile, transitive, but within a particular historical and contemporary context. The demography of the world is so strongly migrant that it makes sense to consider this the substantive core of what *are* the multitudes.

I am not yet in a position to make an equation between 'mass-culture', where arguments are more or less arranged, and the political notion of the multitudes. One comes out of cultural theorising, the other comes out of political history. There may be a way to think of mass culture in relationship to Hardt and Negri's 'multitudes' – I know that the cultural theorist Nikos Papastergiadis has attempted to do this...⁸ There may also be a way to rethink culture through mediatic forms – Internet, digital commons and social media in their more radical aspect. But I personally don't grasp the coordinates by which we would find an equivalence between the notion of multitudes and the cultural phenomena of mass culture.

SA: *Is there such a thing as a future context? A context still to come that a reading of an artwork can compel?*

GK: Is there such a thing as a future context...? There's a contradiction here which is useful. 'Context' is a paradigm that can be laid out for perceptual and phenomenological encounter, it can be lived. 'Future' is a projection. You are combining two words which are not actually commensurable but suggestive. All utopias are in some ways a *landing of that futurist imaginary into a context*. It is like floating an island imbued with a new consciousness, something that is desired, sought for or at least possible to imagine. So while the futurist impulse belongs to the pure imaginary, it does actually settle into some form of a society, or a community, and this of course is *context*. The problem arises precisely with a disjunction between what was prognosticated and propelled into the future as a utopian desire, and what was

achieved. Let us take the Communist utopia (there may be some unease here as Marxists prefer not to use the word 'utopia'). It hovers within the imaginary and, at the crucial historical moment of revolutionary praxis, it seeks to be *realised*. The Communist vision and the context it landed in, or the context it created when it was historically made possible through a revolution: *this is history*. And this is also the most important *critique* of the 20th century – the failure of Soviet Communism to contextualise the lofty promise held forth in its futurist vision

So, yes, there is something like a future context. At the stage of maximum volatility, the futurist vision, and the secure notion of context fly apart. The future is like a projectile sent into unknown space, but it always assumes a context, it settles into a context. And that context can be contrary to the original impulse, which has been the tragedy of most utopian thinking. At another level, when the utopian imaginary is too historically bound to what is already available to our imagination today, it is inadequate. Revolutionary change must exceed what one can imagine contextually. Therefore, there is always this acute tension between contexts and utopias – there is disjunction and disappointment and even tragedy written into that relationship.

SA: *It is interesting how you define future as a projection, because this formulation still insists upon the subject's presence in it. The future is not something that exists out there, beyond the subject. To be a projection that is hurled across, it is still a very strong commitment in the subject that will imagine the future. There is no such future that exists outside of the subject.*

GK: Thank you, Sabih, that's an excellent formulation. So, yes, but the fact that the subject is being attributed this imaginative power is not to suggest that it's all comprehensible, that the 'out there' is an extension of her subjective self. What I am saying draws on two sources. The two nodes from which my thinking proceeds are existentialism and Marxism.

Existentially speaking, there is a subject behind the thought that reaches into the future even if that be in the form of entropy. From the Marxist position, it is a revolutionary force aroused by the people; a force represented by a vanguard, if one believes in vanguardism; or located (in Marxist terms) in the working class (amplified if you like by other collectives – communitarian, even sectarian loyalties). Self, vanguard, history and the future, these form a relay, but that is still a highly attenuated and unpredictable course.

SA: *Where do artists fit into this equation?*

GK: The artist fits much more into the existential ambit, but that is too obvious. It will depend on the alignment the artist makes, which is where my interest lies – in tendencies and trajectories. It will depend on what the artist is partisan to. Is it to his or her solitude? Or partisan to some force in the social field? Let us say that the term 'partisan' is precisely what links the subject to a cause embodied in another formation, a collective. The first step is the choice to align at all. The second step is with whom to align. That will determine the historical trajectory to which you come to be committed – to named utopias or unnamed futures.

So, yes, there is something like a future context. At the stage of maximum volatility, the futurist vision, and the secure notion of context fly apart. The future is like a projectile sent into unknown space, but it always assumes a context, it settles into a context. And that context can be contrary to the original impulse, which has been the tragedy of most utopian thinking.

SA: *Is there a possibility that someone is not aligned? Untethered from alignment?*

GK: In one sense, I would like to answer this question with a 'yes'. But that 'yes' must be qualified immediately. There can be, in one's self-designation, the right to being untethered. But in actual fact, this is hardly ever so, and I will say why. All of us in the philosophic and aesthetic domain are afraid of over-determinism, so we will utter both – a yes and a no. If I say 'no, of course you cannot be untethered', then I have already conceded to a form of determinism. But the reverse is true as well. One knows how these concepts are so powerfully embedded in 20th century intellectual life. Take Gramsci's theory of hegemony; Althusser's notion of interpellation; Foucault's idea of the panopticon. All these concepts determine, down to the smallest operative system, ideology and more – the very conditions of repression, as also of hard-won freedoms. I am speaking of the conditions of relations between human beings; the contract within the social; and the relationship of the one and the other with the state. Our immediate reaction is based on the hope that we will not to be interpellated into systems without a moment of resistance, without saying 'no'. The rest is a contrarian struggle with doubt, refusal and commitment. ■

Geeta Kapur is a critic and curator. Her writing on contemporary art and cultural theory includes widely anthologised essays on alternative modernisms and national paradigms; issues of critical contemporaneity; the positioning of interventionist artworks in inter-media practices; and curatorial initiatives in India and the global South.

Notes

- 1 Geeta Kapur. "Articulating the Self in History: Ghatak's Jukti Takko ar Gappo". In **When was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India** (Tulika, 2000, New Delhi).
- 2 Geeta Kapur. **Contemporary Indian Artists** (Vikas, 1978, New Delhi).
- 3 'Pictorial Space', exhibition, Lalit Kala Akademi, Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi, 1977.
- 4 'Place for People', exhibition, Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay, Rabindra Bhavan Galleries, New Delhi, 1981.
- 5 'Contemporary Indian Art', exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1982.
- 6 See Anita Dube, "Questions and Dialogue", manifesto for the 1987 Baroda exhibition.
- 7 'subTerrain: artworks in the cityfold', exhibition, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2003.
- 8 See Nikos Papastergiadis, "Cosmopolitanism Assemblages Art", in (ed.) Saloni Mathur, **The Migrant's Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora** (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2011, Williamstown, Mass.).

EMBODIED CONSTRUCTIONS

BANARAS THROUGH SATYAJIT RAY'S APARAJITO

Rohit Raj Mehndiratta

Growing up in Delhi, Banaras has always been a distant image of sacredness in my mind. The city actively became a presence in my life when my brother went to pursue his engineering education in the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) Institute of Technology. I was 14 then. The 'Hindu' next to 'Banaras' in the name of the university raised no particular question in my mind, as my brother's hostel room, overlooking a mango tree, and his life in the BHU campus became my predominant image of the city. It, however, became a more curious object as I struggled through my undergraduate dissertation in Ahmedabad. A close friend was at that time actively involved in imposing Deleuze's 'rhizome thinking' to 'order' Banaras, as I tried to make sense of Delhi in relation to post-Independence politics.

Thus, when I finally did travel to Banaras, I had two very different memories: my brother's student life there and my friend's epistemological imposition, along with the visual representations and narratives that created an imagined space of mythic aura that to a large extent structured my experience of the city. I went as an outsider and saw the city through these very different lenses. In them lay a curious interplay of exploring and experiencing the city through a distant aesthetic eye that based itself on other people's knowledge and personal memories.

Introduction

Banaras, one of the most important Hindu pilgrimage sites, is marked with the attribution of a sacredness imagined as uninterrupted through history. Despite much of the city being an 18th century artefact, Banaras in the western world view as well as in the Indian psyche epitomises a 'timeless spirituality', untouched by the trappings of modernity. While for the West, Banaras represents an India of spiritual might, for Indians, Banaras becomes what is their much-desired (self-orientalising) spiritual identity.

Much of the late 19th century Oriental representations and scholarships crucially helped establish the 'mega-myths' of a timeless, sacred Hindu order that Banaras was part of. The popular imagery of the sublime captured through the river-scape, flanked by continuous terraces (the *ghats*) cascading into the river, and the sheer density of religious activity tend to mythologise the city, giving it a singular meaning and expression. These representations to establish meta-narratives of sacredness defy the multiple codings that form an urban environment such as Banaras.¹

It is well worth adapting Roland Barthes' analysis of myth² to Banaras. The popular imaginary naturalises its spiritual references to create an imagination that is impenetrable and irreducible. Identity politics and the economics of pilgrimage and tourism have used, accepted, appropriated and venerated the sacred history of Banaras, exalting it to a meta-narrative that is poetic and many times deeply ideological.³ Modernity has been subsumed in the city's everlasting and perpetuated mythic aura.

As visual narratives use and deform the city of Shiva's history and everyday life to their own ends, one is faced with Barthes' essential paradox: "If we penetrate the object, we liberate it but we destroy it; and if we acknowledge its full weight, we respect it but we restore it to a state that is still mystified".⁴ As Barthes asserted, there are many signifiers that allow myths to be constructed. It is the manner signifiers are used, related and differentiated that serves to sustain the myth as it shifts between the domains of ideologised histories to poetic assertions of timelessness. This is the crucial juncture where I bring in Satyajit Ray's Banaras, as it is both an urban site and a cliché.

Ray's Effort

This paper interrogates the imagination of Banaras in the Satyajit Ray film, *Aparajito* (1957). The film is subsequently re-edited and narratively mapped through its stills to define a city as an embodied structure of human experience and urban memory.

Aparajito is the second in a trilogy of neo-realist films, the first being *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Little Road*, 1954) and the third being *Apur Sansar* (*The World of Apu*, 1960).⁵ Popularly seen as a national allegory, these three films are visualised through the journey of growth of a boy (Apu) from a priestly family in a village in feudal Bengal, to the city and thence to the realm of modernity. Approximately a third of *Aparajito* is set in Banaras, the backdrop for Apu's life with his parents from about age nine until the death of his father, at which point, Apu leaves Banaras with his mother. Many believe that these films made Ray India's emblematic national artist in the decade after Independence.

With the support of the post-colonial state, Ray's work in those early years is seen by many as a self-conscious development of an Indian art form separated from other film traditions and practices. Ray's trilogy followed a practice that believed in a critical engagement with the nation-state's project of modernity, expressed through the aesthetic of realism. Instead of studio shooting, melodrama, complex editing to structure narrative fluidity and musical performance-based sequences, the stress was on the type of narrative, representation and characters that would allow the real to emerge. Some of Ray's realist strategies included location shooting, the use of non-professional actors, the avoidance of ornamental *mise-en-scène*, a preference for natural light and a freely-moving documentary style of photography.⁶

However, beyond the agenda of realism, Ray's engagement with the nationalist cultural discourse in the area of art and craft is critical. Late 19th century nationalism, according to Partha Chatterjee, sought to define an 'inner' national identity outside the cultural construction that came from colonial practices.⁷ The new aesthetic philosophy set its agenda within this broader discourse and was mainly characterised by the aspiration of creating new artistic idioms that imagined a culturally sovereign 'nation'.

The nationalist aesthetic discourse was inspired by late 19th century Oriental scholarship, as seen in the work of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, that started to define Indian arts, culture and aesthetics through a *vedic* worldview. Coomaraswamy's writings provided the core of historical knowledge and archaeological expertise on the Indian aesthetic tradition. This scholarship, as Tapati Guha-Thakurta indicates, became a legitimising base for the nationalist aesthetic discourse.⁸ This new Oriental scholarship was, despite its romantic-classical structure, more sympathetic to Indian culture than the older, official understanding of the Oriental subject. This distinction marked their central role in the formulation of nationalist thought.

The aesthetic structure of nationalism involved finding an organic rhythm in nature and in cultural artefacts, and a sacredness in everyday life – notions reflected throughout the Apu trilogy. As the frame is filled through pictorial details of everyday life, Ray brings the aesthetic language and cultural concepts of Santiniketan and Indian nationalism through

a realist sensibility. A sensibility that in Andre Bazin's words, transferred "to screen the continuum of reality".⁹

Banaras and *Aparajito*

The two sensibilities, one nationalist and the other realist, tend to blend an art practice that responded to the requirements of state formation and its modernising mission. The popular notion of Ray's ostensibly non-ideological position sees *Aparajito*, along with the entire trilogy, as a narrative and aesthetic strategy that bridges, as Ravi Vasudevan suggests, the chasm between civilisational identity and modernity. A strategy that overwrites the long and problematic history of colonial modernity, and instead authenticates the modern, and its middle class vehicle, by showing it as emerging from previous aesthetic traditions.¹⁰

In this interpretation, the ecology of the villages and the environments of Banaras are the necessary thresholds to the site of modernity, Calcutta. One could argue that in this fashioning of a national allegory, tradition has been positioned in order to reveal and psychologise both the potentials and the traumas encountered in the experience of modernity and nation-building. Ray's work set within the nation-state's modernising mission reframed Banaras within a larger narrative content. The very position of Banaras, as a threshold to modernity, allows the mythic structure to be re-worked, especially when viewed from the perspective of a nationalist discourse that prioritised everyday life.

For *Aparajito* engages with the city, so to speak, to bring individual experiences, sacred or secular, into the realm of everyday life. In the act of documenting the city, of making it part of a national allegory, of continuing a nationalist aesthetic agenda that sought to problematise Oriental constructions, one finds a city positioned in multiple roles, textured by minute events. As Geeta Kapur states, if this film is seen as an ethnographic allegory,¹¹ it allows us to read the narration against the grain of the local and mythological histories that form Banaras. The act of choosing events and the manner of recording becomes delicate and problematic; as the movie symbolises social formations, the potential of recording a social discourse is created.

Ray characterises Apu and his parents, Harihar and Sarbajaya, through different urban settings that mark their identity, their community, and reveal Banaras through that view. *Aparajito* re-situates Banaras as a system of spatial structures embodied by individuated rituals of everyday life. As different aspects of Banaras are revealed in the film through individuated experiences, we encounter the conceptual matrix that constantly re-defines the idea of community (*jati*) and identity at a cultural as well as at an urban level.¹²

***Aparajito* re-edited**

In exploring Banaras through *Aparajito*, I attempt a reading of the city and aspects of its culture as structured by Ray's parameters.

Banaras is viewed and re-presented in terms of the three individual narratives that embody the urban space of *Aparajito*'s Banaras. Further, positioning the city back on the drawing board, its embodied urban sites reveal very different and varied local spatial systems and urban histories that help form a representational technique through a medium of film stills and analytical narration. A re-edited *Aparajito* (5 mins; made by the author) re-situates Banaras as a system of spatial structures embodied by individuated rituals of everyday life.

The film stills of the 're-edited *Aparajito*' explore and analyse the individuated spaces questioning the idea of collective histories, identities that render cities with singular meta-interpretations and the urban spaces with a sense of false neutrality. In doing so, a new representational process is formed that allows the deconstruction of meta-narratives that reify urban history.

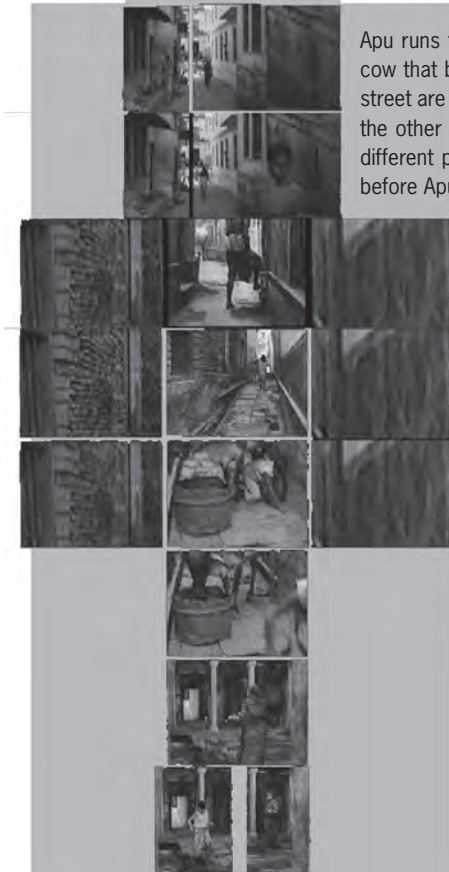
APARAJITO RE-EDITED :: **APU**

Apu is introduced into the movie with a friend. They are at opposite ends of a wall. The frame also reveals partial figures of a rabbit and a dog drawn on the wall. This space of the wall supports different forms of craft traditions, engages us in a 'new' notion of community and aspired-to identity that Indian nationalist art sought to give the 'nation' through folk art.

He walks down the steps of the *ghats*, looks in passing at the metaphorical gateway created by the wrestler, goes from land into the water and upon returning stops to look at the wrestler again. Tradition is engaged to reflect Apu's unconscious confrontation and passages.



Apu emerges on the horizon. Apu's body starts to form the perspective that is framed by the *ghats* to allow a powerful superimposition of sky and ghat. In between these two powerful elements lie Apu's trajectories between two realities: his vexed position between tradition and modernity.



Apu runs through the streets with his friends, a chase that is ended by a cow that blocks a narrow alley. The conditions of the walls that frame this street are in stark contrast to each other. One is peeling and worn out, while the other is a smooth surface, completely plastered: a sense of two very different psychological spaces. They set up the context for the threshold before Apu returns home to his mother.

The scene ends with Apu running towards the cow and gaining his freedom by scrambling under it. In how it is framed, the cow literally becomes the weight of an imagined tradition, a gateway Apu struggles through, to enter Sarbajaya's space.



Apu literally walks the seam that ties two worlds together, the world of culture/tradition (the *ghat*) and a more secularly imaged world of nature (the sky and the river). The *ghats* that structure Apu's movement have a sectional complexity, a relative narrowness of space and strong borders (the city wall and the river) between which they are built. In all their picturesque magnificence, the *ghats* never dominate Apu.





This palace, built by the King of Bengal in 1830, is an important representation for the Bengali community in Banaras that Harihar is a part of. Ray closes up to frame Harihar's body against the distant yet solid presence of the palace. His body dominates the frame, individualising Harihar's character, and yet is set within the framework of power that consolidates his association with the Bengali community.

The background changes to the steep flight of steps of the adjacent Kausatthi Ghat. It's a sacred site, containing in its precincts a temple of 64 goddesses, and is an important point of certain pilgrimages. The steps of the ghat become a monumental backdrop against which Harihar creates his own path as the shot ends with his body being enframed in the flood of steep steps that form this space.

APARAJITO RE-EDITED :: HARIHAR

It's early morning. A priest is feeding pigeons at dawn. People are offering ablutions along the *ghats*. Harihar emerges from his ritual engagement with the river into *ghats*. His movement is set against another priest and the Dighpatia Palace's monumental façade.





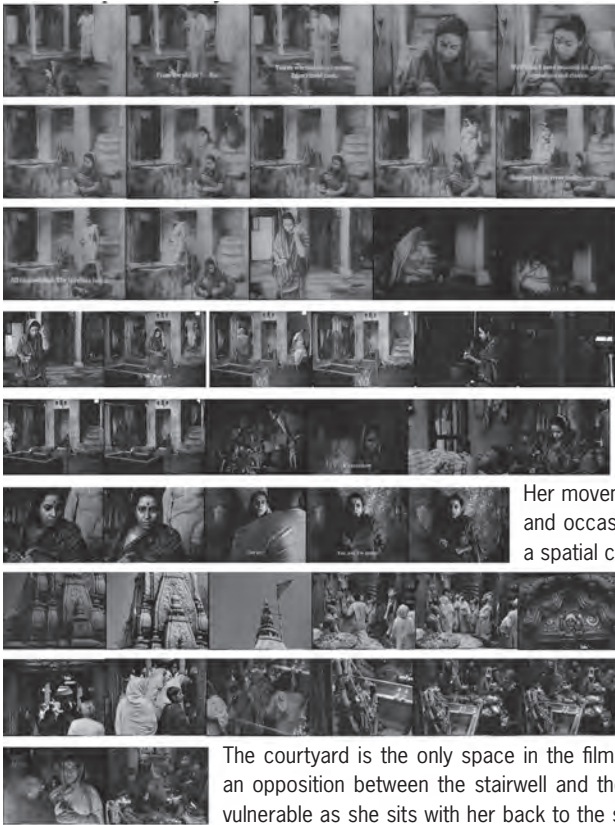
The *ghats* are not allowed to take on a purely iconic aspect. The power of the steps as connectors, as the spatial base that absorbs all individual idiosyncrasies into a collective sacred imagination, is emphasised. Textures of everyday life index the passage of time through the play of shadows between various elements of the *ghats*: niches created in solid plinths, steps, platforms, temporary structures and human activity. Representations of tradition (sacred and secular) are positioned to create places that define Banaras's urbanity.

The film leads us onto the edge of Darabhanga Ghat where Harihar is reading scriptures to widows along the plinth edge. As Ray moves away from Harihar's enclosure, he reveals the horizontal formation of the Munshi Ghat, its length articulated by linear flights of steps that are fragmented by the interspersed octagonal plinths. People sitting on the plinth farther away complete this frame.



APARAJITO RE-EDITED :: **SARBAJAYA**

From the *ghats*, we move with the camera into the private space of the family, into the courtyard of the house, into Sarbajaya's domain. Sarbajaya is cleaning the courtyard. Demarcated by columns and a floor edge, and containing a concrete basin and tap, the courtyard becomes the enclosure that contains her life in Banaras.



Her movements beyond this space are to the kitchen and the bedroom, and occasional visits to the main temple. The courtyard thus becomes a spatial container that she maintains and protects (from the monkey).

The courtyard is the only space in the film that is actually a film set. Ray creates an opposition between the stairwell and the tap in the courtyard. This makes her vulnerable as she sits with her back to the stairwell, always subject to an unknown, unexpected visitor, to becoming the object of someone's gaze. Ray often frames her against the steps (empty or filled), highlighting her vulnerability when men living on the floors above come downstairs. Paradoxically, this space that is hers is also the space where she is most vulnerable.



What maintains her security and separation is the purdah. It is the purdah that divides the space between men and women. Throughout the movie Sarbajaya negotiates her privacy and honour against the various men, particularly the musician who lives on the terrace.



Harihar, Sarbajaya and Apu's spatial trajectories allow the city to be read as a continuous threshold, a passage that forms indeterminable spatial zones. They create their own, separate urban situations, engaging different traditions and city spaces. The urban experience and definition of the city emerge from the cultural/psychological disposition of an individual. Ray, in his representation of Banaras, allows this operational definition of urbanity. ■

Notes

- 1 Websites that image Banaras today, such as varanasi.nic.in, portray a city based in and lived/experienced as myth.
- 2 Roland Barthes. **Mythologies** (Hill and Wang, New York, 1972).
- 3 As much as Banaras plays an important role in establishing Hindu mythology, the city also plays a strong ideological role in constructing contemporary political Hindu identity.
- 4 Barthes, op. cit., p. 158.
- 5 The entire trilogy visualises the Bengali novels by Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay (1929/1932) that narrate the history of pre-war Bengal through the story of a boy whose home is continuously displaced through tragic deaths in his family (first his sister, then his parents and finally his wife). He moves from his village to the city of Banaras, eventually coming to Calcutta and finally a ship bound to South America.
- 6 See Mark Sheil, **Italian Neorealism: Re-Building the Cinematic City** (Willflower Press, 2006, London), p. 2.
- 7 Partha Chatterjee. **Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories** (Oxford University Press, 1997, Delhi), pp. 5-6.
- 8 Tapati Guha-Thakurta. **The Making of a New Indian Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c.1850-1920** (Cambridge University Press, 1992, Cambridge) p. 185.
- 9 André Bazin. **What is Cinema?** (University of California Press, 1967, Berkeley, Los Angeles), p. 37.
- 10 Ravi Vasudevan. "Nationhood, Authenticity and Realism in Indian Cinema: the double take of modernism in the work of Satyajit Ray" (Sarai, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi). Available at: http://www.sarai.net/research/media-city/resources/film-city-essays/ravi_vasudevan03.pdf (last accessed 19 February 2013).
- 11 Geeta Kapur. "Cultural creativity in the First Decade: The Example of Satyajit Ray". In **The Journal of Arts and Ideas** 23-24, pp. 40-41 (January 1993).
- 12 Partha Chatterjee reports extensive use of the term jati:
 - As origin, such as Musalman by birth, Vaisnav by birth, a beggar by birth (jatite musalman, jatbhikari).
 - Classes of living species, such as the human jati, the animal jati, the bird jati, etc.
 - Varna following from classifications according to guna and karma such as brahman, etc.
 - Vamsa, gotra, kula (lineage, clan) such as Arya jati, Semitic jati.
 - Human collectivities bound by loyalty to the state or organised around the natural and cultural characteristics of a country or province, such as English, French, Bengali, Punjabi, Japanese, Gujrati, etc. See Chatterjee, op. cit., p. 221.

THINKING ART IN INDIA: A SEMI-VIRTUAL LAB

Manuela Ciotti + Gigi Scaria



Encounters

• MANUELA: Live encounter with Gigi on Easter Day 2012 in New Delhi. Chasing artists who exhibited at the India Pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale the previous year.¹ I saw the art works; I now wanted to see who made them. I wanted to trace the connection from the object back to the maker, and look at what happens along the way. I entered that elevator, I went up and down.² Visualising home interiors, eating South Indian food, meeting Gigi's family and being shown art works in catalogues and on the computer. Surrealism at its best, time passing unnoticed and a lot of laughter. Wanting to know more about what art-making in India means today, where it is going, who is (un) making what, how 'India' features in artistic production and, above all, why. With Gigi in mind, I was curious to know what moves a Delhi-based artist, what that 'based' is all about, how he ends up making the things he makes, how he talks about 'India' without putting it into the picture, or putting it in the way

others don't. Oh, too difficult, I need to know more.

• GIGI: Yes, Manuela came to visit me last Easter in Rohini. There is no specific significance attached to last year's Easter except for the fact that it was 'Resurrection Day' for a new set of laughter. We talked a lot and joked a lot. I was surprised by the pure Hindi coming from an Italian tongue. The only other Italian woman I know who speaks Hindi in Delhi is Sonia Gandhi. But Manuela's Hindi was far 'superior', with proper accent and grammar. I have no clue on how to start and where to start with my adventures in the capital city. But when I landed in Delhi in 1995 – straight from another capital city called Trivandrum (now Thiruvananthapuram) – I was really struck by the similarities between the two. Difference of language aside, I smelt the power, the starched white collars and the laziness in the air. But Delhi changed a lot over the past 15 years. Things such as malls, the metro and CNG appeared. Over these years,

I witnessed change not just in Delhi, but in Kerala and in other parts of India too as I kept on travelling. Change took place in India like a bush fire, a kind of 'uniformity' descended upon us, and has been witnessed by all of us, all over India. As with the economic boom, this came as a real surprise. All of a sudden people started to think alike. They thought about the same brand, the same lifestyle, and had the same body language, tinted with the same arrogance. India's dramatic change was like a new layer of debris glittering on old trash. One thing was clear though: we began to assert our position on the 'white globe'. We no longer wanted to be known as the 'third world'. We began to call ourselves 'the world of strategy'.

• MANUELA: Coincidentally, I began my inquiry into things 'Indian' around the time you moved to Delhi. However, unlike you, Gigi, the metropolis was not to become my compass. The village did, and that in north India. There was where my 'Hindi school'

happened. Over the years, I recorded a different change, not the self-evident one which marks the built environment – like that which became very visible in Indian metropolises – rather that change visible in the ways subaltern communities carried themselves, talked back to a system which had long neglected them but also got on with their lives, as part of Indian society. Malls, hotels, ATM machines and other impending signs of ‘the world of strategy’, and the overall construction fever, appeared in the urban space closest to the village too, and their presence became as ‘totemic’ as the pre-existing array of temples and old buildings in the city. But do changes in the built environment reflect changes in social relations? Hmmm, I doubt. Perhaps you, Gigi, have an ‘urban’ answer to this.

- GIGI: Perhaps it all started by observing changes in everyday life. Metro cities in India are a microcosm of the country. Sometimes we knowingly apply the ‘rule of universality’ to such microcosms, and it often works. Many layers of contrast within a society open up the possibility for new encounters at every moment. I started mapping the city. I went into thick and thin gullies in Old and New Delhi. I saw the drainage system broken all over, and the heap of human waste stuck in the middle of traffic jams. My first

encounter with Madangir and Laxmi Nagar neighbourhoods made me rethink the logic of civilisation. Maybe Kerala was too clean a place to live in. But I placed myself in the middle of a crowded junction. I moved in and out to different gullies and again went back to the same junction. My approach slowly developed its characteristics. I found myself observing as well as reacting ‘aesthetically’ to the visuals around me. Maybe aesthetics is too big a term to deal with, especially for someone like me who has Marxian blood in his veins. But life goes on, and now I don’t shy off using the term ‘aesthetics’ at all. After all, we talk about visuals and appearance, whether it is about the city or social behaviour.

- MANUELA: See, Gigi, I reacted to what I saw in writing; the visual dimension has been absent in my village-based reflections, and I found it difficult to reproduce it in a text. One just needs the thing. For some reasons, people’s words and mine occupied a prominent place in my efforts to try to understand India’s transformation through the eyes of those subaltern communities. Later on, another symptom of change (or symbol of change?) captured my attention: art, the market behind it, the people who make/buy/look at art – and it is difficult not to go visual there! And I too have deployed the term ‘aesthetics’, although in a different

way from you. I used it as something generated by art production but referring not to it, but to Indian society. I am in fact trying to understand how “the relationship between art and market has engendered an aesthetic of social and economic change”.³ You react and make (and write about your own making); I react and write about others’ making, buying, appreciating, and produce my own explanatory narrative. And now we talk about them!

Wings of Perception

- MANUELA: I grew up in a place with a strong museum culture, saturated with art and with art history in the school curricula. I often wonder: how do the built-environment and the aesthetics of it influence the way one perceives/ understands/relates to art? It is quite difficult to talk about what has surely become part of my cognitive make-up but has never become the subject for self-reflection. It is a question which came up when I began to write about art, and I am sure it will accompany me for quite some time. What if I had grown up in a tropical forest? Gigi, how was this for you?

- GIGI: Given that you mentioned a tropical forest, mine is a classic example of that. I grew up in Kerala but had a basic understanding of what was happening in the visual arts.



Each region of India is exposed to the art of that region, with its unique understanding and perspective. The idea of the museum and the classical, modern and contemporary art world may not be immediately available to the people living in a given region. But each society – no matter how ‘primitive’ – understands the power of the visual and the narrative structure which it has carried over generations, and enjoys the pleasure and the happiness the visual generates among individuals and collectives. I don’t want to discuss the usual subject of tradition and modernity when I talk about our understanding of art. It is not because that subject has no relevance in the current times, but I am bored of it. I must say I understand art inside the museum as well as outside it. At the same time, my understanding of art does not come from the notion and the function of the museum and the gallery alone. My understanding is shaped by a series of doubts and observations on life in general, and many curious encounters with certain thinking logics, and by efforts of making sense or nonsense of my current existence as opposed to my previous births and incarnations. Culture contributes in great degree to your thinking habits. Often one tries to break that. But, I must admit, culture is a creature, a monster, which swallows up whoever speaks against it. This is the tricky part

that all of us are struggling with. We use the tools of culture to break its logic by creating another culture, and then we get consumed by the same culture against which we were fighting in the first place. It is another vicious circle of death and rebirth. So let me put it very simply: my understanding of art actually does not come from art.

- MANUELA: Ah, I think we share the engagement with structures (and strictures) of knowledge which shape everything we wish to make an intervention upon. This is a tough job as those structures are resilient! As for my understanding of art, this is shaped by the awareness that art lives both in the museum and outside it. I often associate art to the museum because that is what has been its repository par excellence in my culture. But my research interest on art has another source: it was the materiality of it, the agency of the making and the why of the making, which drew me to it. It has to do with my anthropological genes. And as we are both interpreters of Indian society through different media, what I am currently exploring is what art stands for right now, in particular contemporary art. Why, at this very historical juncture, is India producing contemporary art, and what kind of society is this art talking about? Even when I think of art produced in the diaspora: the

umbilical cord to India has not been severed, rather the contrary. There must be a reason why art produced by artists of Indian descent is presented as ‘Indian’.

- GIGI: If we are aiming to pin down the ‘Indian-ness’ of Indian art, this is a very complex issue. India has always been producing contemporary art, but it has been noticed by the ‘western’ world only recently. They only understood India through the lens of the world of ancient wisdom and Hindu civilisation. I understand that we lack a modernity which resulted from the industrial revolution and the planned urbanisation of this part of the world. We don’t have a fully developed modern era in order to connect to the ‘post-modern’ or to the contemporary. But at the same time, we made a huge leap from a pre-Independence to a post-Independence world. Though time is a linear concept, we live in parallel times, where one could experience multiple time-zones within the same geographical zone. So, contemporary art lives in parallel to traditional art as long as we are aware of the existence of these parallel time zones. The art produced from this geographical zone will obviously have certain qualities of the land and its thinking structures, as in the case of Europe, South America, Asia and the Pacific. If you call it Indianness, that is unavoidable.

The Market of India

• MANUELA: Sure, there is a profound link between art and the geographical region in which it is produced, and when it is produced. On this, one interesting aspect of contemporary art from India is, as Kavita Singh has argued, the ways in which private enterprise acts as a substitute for the public, and given the government-run museums' limitations in collecting contemporary art, a private collection might be the most important repository for art produced over the past decade.⁴ The role of the private together with that of the market affects significantly the relation between the symbolic and material value of art. And given that the rise of contemporary art has taken place in the context of rising mass-consumerism in India, this too is important. But the market is not the *only* driving force behind the wave of contemporary art in India today, right? In fact, a great deal of what of you do, Gigi, is not market-funded, as there are museums and foundations involved. And many are abroad. Abroad and not abroad. I have seen a lot of contemporary art from India out of India. That's how my interest in contemporary art – which as I said earlier, I view as a symbol (or symptom) of change – began, with an exhibition in London.⁵ How did the art get there, by whom and why, and why should people be interested? Give me a reason or two, or more. And thinking more

of the role of the market I mentioned above, I am also reflecting on the tension between the art world's trends of inclusiveness (increasing museum access, educational programmes, and the process of democratisation of art more generally) *and* exclusiveness (the elitist nature of the art market and its own inclusive modes such as affordable art fairs and galleries in malls amongst the others – which nevertheless remain out of the purview of the masses): how does the public and private axis inform these trends in India? At this point, I can no longer distinguish between public and private. But I think I should be able to. Help?

• GIGI: I think the role of India within the global economy was the initial motivation for the western world to look at the art being produced there. A very similar story to that of China but which, in the case of India, happened much later. India has been once again a curious place for investors to look into. However, this time the snake charmers and the great old tradition have taken the backseat. The world was curious to watch how 'traditional' India copes with 'modern' India – though both these terms were contributed by the 'great old western tradition'. They somehow observed how contemporary life thrives in newly developed urban spaces which are 'devoid of tradition' and now hold a confused market

value system. Curators invited Indian artists to explore the emerging and more spectacular aspects of urban change linked to mass consumerism. The outcome was a series of Indian art shows in the western world. Some made a successful contribution towards introducing contemporary India to the world. But many fell into the exoticism-filled-new-bottles mode. I sadly realised India could never come out of its exotic existence from the moment its name is spelt. We live with many contradictions: western observations of India could be the finest of all.

• MANUELA: I have also wondered about India's re- or de-exoticisation through contemporary art.⁶ That's why I raised the question of 'Indianness' earlier on: there is a fine line between drawing from one's own regional background *and* re-exoticising practices. And speaking of names, as you just mentioned, the very label 'Indian' attached to art engenders a whole set of expectations on audiences who might want to be shown 'Indian' motifs, iconography and traits they are familiar with. You've got to see an elephant, a god and a lot of colours.

• GIGI: Also, I do always distinguish between the public and the private. Our country is the best place in the world to see these differences. Public here is filthy, chaotic, noisy, contaminated

and survives by the will of God. It is where the traps appear in the shape of a manhole. It is where the cracks in the middle of the road lead to eternity. But private is different. It exists within the gated communities among the debris. It mingles with the rest of the world as a curious outsider. Unfortunately, art made its space there. Even if it goes out from that space in the name of an out-reach programme, it invites its own communities to be viewed in a dislocated space. So the question of who art is for has no confusing answers. It is always for the artist who makes it and for the immediate world which connects to him or her. So far, I haven't come across a system of alternative practice in India – that is one which opens up one's creative energy to a wider audience than the existing one.

- MANUELA: Perhaps it is because of the lack of contemporary art museums and public spaces for art that these alternative practices have not found their way to India? It is undeniable that the 'fever of the contemporary' is still to spread – especially in terms of infrastructure. And as you mentioned China earlier on, just the other day I visited the 9th Shanghai Biennale, 'Reactivation', hosted in a restored power station soon-to-be-turned into the Shanghai Contemporary Museum. A free-admission impressive space.

At the exhibition's third floor, I was nicely surprised by three exhibition staff who – when they saw me – began dancing in a circle and sang: "Ooh, this is so contemporary, contemporary, contemporary, this is so contemporary, contemporary, contemporary..." as if the contemporaneity of the whole Biennale wasn't already enough! Perhaps the contemporary in India has thus far existed in those dislocated (closed-off) spaces that you have mentioned or in private collections.

Dialogues and Lab-oratoring

- MANUELA: Skype throughout, since Delhi encounter. A 'place' of thinking in-between encounters. Sometimes, it also serves to exchange material imaginaries: "Have you seen this", pushing the object or the image against the webcam. "What is it?" Yes, Gigi, but speaking of imaginaries, and also given that you haven't fallen prey to re-exoticising desires, I still want to ask you, what is in your head? Why do you do the things you do? How do you feed your imagination? God, my own head is full now.

- GIGI: Skype is a fascinating way to communicate. I always wonder if we tried to get access to the Skype conversations happening all over the world in a fraction of a second, what kind of narrative we would get. Through Skype, we frame ourselves

into a conversation, a conversation which can be directed with the ability of a filmmaker. We sit and chat across different continents and adjust our time with a mental ability to receive the other person's image or his/her surroundings. Skype is a stage to perform on with a lot of intimacy and passion. Through this mode of conversation, you will be able to frame yourself in the way you want to be viewed by the other person. No other medium of communication will have the power to control your own image. 'What is in your head?' is an interesting question. Essentially, it is about observing my own life as well as the ones I am surrounded by. I try to understand the way situations are created or evolve towards a story which has not been told by anyone before. I might frame it visually or make many versions of it in order to challenge my ability to deal with it. While engaging with this narrative, I certainly travel through many other narratives which are not directly linked or have nothing to do with me. There, I see the possibility of 'history' being made instantly in front of me. My head spins around behavioural patterns and cultural codes which make me a social being. In short, it would be more appropriate to ask what happens when my head is alert than what is in my head. And, if I stayed back in Kerala, I would have produced very different art, so moving around has enlarged the range of

experiences I described above. When you are creatively involved, you are engaging with a cultural space which already exists: whether you disagree or agree or want to remain out of it, you are adding another space to the pre-existing one. The experience of living is generated out of these actions. But the feeling of 'living' is not very easy to experience. The agony and pain one has to go through to realise that one is living can be summed up as a 'short story of life'. I do what I do just because I want to think that I am living. I do therefore I live.

• MANUELA: I am not 'space-driven' when I do things, but I have a very similar view on the ways our imaginaries are fed by movement and the experience of the elsewhere. This is reflected also by how I have come to conceive my exploration of contemporary art from India: if I looked at it only in India and not out of it, I would produce an account which ignored other important dimensions around it – circulation, for example, just to mention one. And about doing and living, my research and writing on art really made me feel more alive than ever before. Sometimes museums (and exhibitions) have moved me. Earlier this year, I entered the Art Institute in Chicago, and the building brought tears to my eyes. The collections were unimaginably beautiful (and I have seen a lot of art in

my life). I think this is one of the things which 'public' should do to people. Gigi, do you want to move people or invoke something else in them?

• GIGI: If I said I would like to 'move' people through my art, I would be over-ambitious. I would like people to think about what they see or experience at least for a fraction of a second. If I achieved that, I would be happy.

Anti-epilogue

Beside the ongoing conversations, Manuela and Gigi also share the global predicament of hyper-mobility and interconnectedness. Manuela travels, Gigi travels, questions travel. Places change, questions stay. Answers linger. One example: Gigi is in Australia, Manuela in South Korea. Gigi lived in South Korea, he suggests galleries and palaces. Manuela remembers having being shown works by Gigi about the Seoul metro station.⁷ Gigi asks, "How was the Gwangzhou Art Biennale?" "Memorable, but installation after installation, I really wanted to see a painting", Manuela replies – more thinking on genres is required here. Questions only increase in number. "What are you doing there?" Manuela asks. "I am thinking of a solo exhibition I am going to have next year", he says. Manuela wants to ask, 'How do you think about an exhibition?' But then she doesn't, she'll do it next year. ■

Notes

- 1 Manuela Ciotti. "The Nation's Aesthetic Production: 'India-out-of-India', or a National Pavilion at the 54th Venice Art Biennale". Paper presented at the University of Warwick, 25 September 2012.
- 2 Gigi Scaria. **Elevator from the Subcontinent**, three-channel video installation with sound, video duration: 10 min (2011).
- 3 Manuela Ciotti. "Post-colonial Renaissance: 'Indianness', Contemporary Art and the Market in the Age of Neoliberal Capital". In **Third World Quarterly** 33(4), pp. 633-651 (2012).
- 4 Kavita Singh. "Where in the world" (2010). Available at: http://globalartmuseum.de/site/guest_author/163 (last accessed 23 December 2012).
- 5 See the analysis of the exhibition 'The Empire Strikes Back: Indian Art Today' in Manuela Ciotti 2012.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Gigi Scaria. 'Triviality of Everyday Existence', 2008.



DIGITAL CONSTELLATION IN THE 'CONTEMPORARY'

Srinivas Aditya Mopidevi

The challenge of talking about the past in its general totality has been two-fold. First, there is an assumption that history is a single, grand, linear idea of time that needs to be peeled away layer by layer, filled gap by gap, all the while maintaining objectivity intact. Second is the belief that the chronology of cultural practice and its associated social contexts help us in contributing to the larger conception of history. Such engagements with the past more often overshadow and appropriate the multiplicities of cultural processes that exist in and belong to different, even contrasting, registers of time and space.

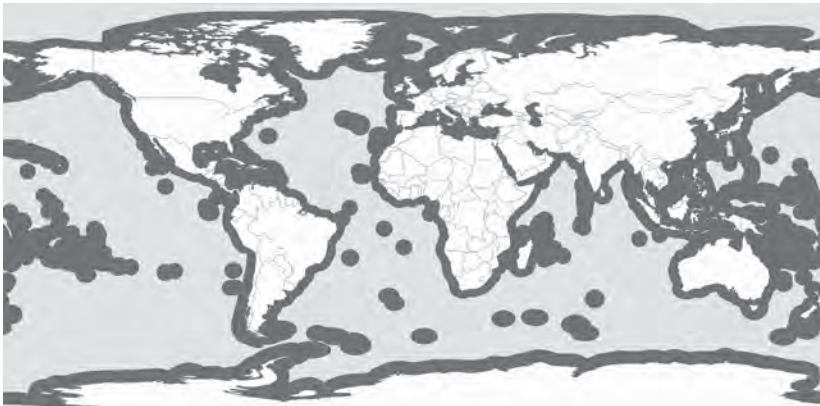
The hesitation to recognise the varied lives of practices by dominant historicist narratives results in the stitched incisions, smoothened interruptions and cemented seepages of those sites that hold the potential to question the most fundamental premises of art history and its dominant teleological approach. The teleological approach, and its ideas of time, proves to be inadequate while dealing with the 'messiness' of the contemporary,¹ where time is simultaneously folded like a paper boat and a paper rocket, and thrown into the vastness of the sea and sky to inhabit the multiple registers of its flows.

Within the crisis of contemporaneity, where and how does one locate the digital? Does one look at it as a process or as a medium? Or as the various micro-registers of capital's fluid re-organisation, produced by dispersed financial markets that ride largely on digital networks, playing on their speed? Yet their porosity, leakages, breakdowns, crashes, reversals remind the world that it is running through, and is manned by, the chaotic medium that is the digital. Further, the digital is also the space of a vast production of contemporary capitalism, where shutdowns, bankruptcies, injunctions and even class struggles are operative.² However, there is some difficulty in strictly locating the digital in any specifically defined singularity; instead it can conceptually be taken as a constellation of forces, mediums and processes with varied levels of intensities and inconsistencies.

The massive expansion across geographic locations, cultural processes and curatorial imaginations complicates the logic of conceptualising the practices of contemporary as territorially defined. In other words, the landscapes of contemporary cultures increasingly mobilised by the digital need a different historical attitude, one that thinks beyond the dominant totalising categories of the nation-state. These existing historical framings seem to be inadequate, especially for their aspirations to build homogeneities of artistic imagination and perceive the varied inhabitations of contemporary practices as part of singular territorial identity. As a methodological response, I would like to propose a curatorial approach towards history, where the past and the present, and the past in the present, can be seen in their multiple co-existences and co-inhabitations in shifting temporalities and territorialities through the fields of cultural practice. In other words, I propose here an idea of curatorial assemblage that brings together the metaphors of ships, seas, solids, liquids, *impostors*, *missing persons* to speak through the multiple dimensions of the digital and vis-à-vis capital, postulated for us by some artistic practitioners.

Fluid Extensions

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman proposed the idea of “liquid modernity”³ as a response to the altered dynamics of capital and power circulations after the global expansion fuelled predominantly by developments in cultures of communication. In this era, a new type of war persists, not the one which conquers a new territory, but the one that crushes and dissolves the walls and boundaries that come in the way of newly dispersing liquid flows of capital and power. As Bauman observes, “for power to be free to flow, the world must be free of fences, barriers, fortified borders and checkpoints. Any dense and tight network of social bonds, and particularly a territorially rooted tight network, is an obstacle to be cleared out of the way”.⁴ According to him, the restlessness and openness inherent to liquidity as such cannot but create greater inequality and more social and economic polarisation. These inequalities shall be generated by the increasing rise of a fluid global elite and the dispersed institutional structures of control that together constitute a programme of disenfranchisement of the poor and other marginal people in the name of their welfare and re-organisation.⁵



Territorial waters of the world
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS,
OCTOBER 2011

Drawing on Bauman's postulations, I invoke here a metaphor of territorial waters to speak of digital technologies that indeed acted as major instrumental forces in blurring borders and boundaries. In the conventional sense, territorial waters are waters that exist within the jurisdiction of the state, extending 12 nautical miles at most from shore.⁶ The collision of the word 'water' with 'territory' gives an understanding of the latter as a fluid dimension – not only as solid land, but also as fluid water – thus further extending the directions of its flow and helping it seep in and out of various territorial limits, lands and formations.

The digital turn, then, can be understood as a massive interruption and disruption, perhaps as large as a volcanic eruption, a hurricane for that matter, even comparable to a *tsunami*, leading many territorial waters (practices) to converge, jump over, spread across and run through to a number of locations and territorial limits. Every meeting site of these convergences is fragile, as it allows for newer significations/power relations to emerge, often extending beyond the specific baggage of the territorial entities they began with. This interruption is also instrumental in variously extending the fluid dimensions of the present in the ways practices are made and shared across sites and contexts. The concepts of interruption and disruption are useful in contrast to something like an intervention in identifying the repercussions of the digital on artistic practice. While an intervention is like an arrow that is pre-figured with some definite motive, interruptions and disruptions are like teasers to the very foundations of practice that swing their directions to terrains we have not anticipated or foreseen.

The baggage of territories within contemporary practice is shrunken, diluted and perhaps dissolved in the circulation of these interrupted flows. The larger labels of nationality and ethnicity are unpacked to reinvent more mobile forms, where identities and significations liquefy on the move and as they move.⁷ As Irit Rogoff suggests, the meaning of the work/practice is not immanently hidden, but generated as the event unfolds.⁸ According to this logic, every event is a new unfolding, as it allows the practice to acquire a new form, a new intensity and, more importantly, a newer configuration of speech.

The instances I cite in this paper collaborate to produce an event, one that does not have any strictly pre-defined goal. They unfold to both produce and dissolve a range of postulations on mobility, capital, trade, the digital and subjectivity, moving and building levels of conceptual relationships and contradictions.

Imaginary Geographies

Partly resembling a world-scape and partly a memory drawing, the process of this work by the Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective was conceptualised as a network map of links, layers, nodes, conversations and friendships shared through and between three personal computers of the Raqs members. From being a digital drawing on the computer screens of Raqs, this image went on to take the form of *The Great Bare Mat*, fuelling levels of conversations and collaborations between artists, anthropologists, historians, philosophers, scientists and musicians from different parts of the world.⁹

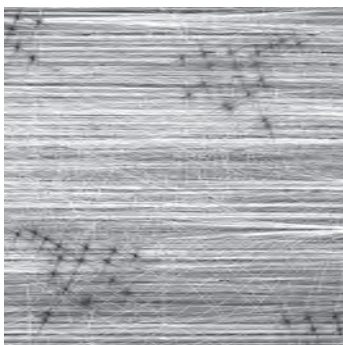
On a second take, the image resonates through/across the lines of experience we inhabit in today's world that is made up of the sign system of graphic scribbles. It suggests to us imaginary geographies beyond a specific cartographic representation, aiding us to see them as threads, lines and colour hues, whose beginnings and belongings are multiple and are continuously multiplied.

In another register of voyages, transitions and departures, in *The Knots that Bind are the Knots that Fray*, Raqs uses found footage of the last distinct Titan cranes that were dismantled and loaded onto a heavy load vessel at the Tyneside Swan Hunter Shipyard, in northern England and shipped all the way to the Bharati Shipyard on the west coast of India.

*The Great Bare Mat
& Constellation,*

Raqs Media Collective, 2012

ALL IMAGES COURTESY ARTISTS



*The Knots that Bind are
the Knots that Fray,*
Raqs Media Collective
Seven-screen digital film
installation, 2010

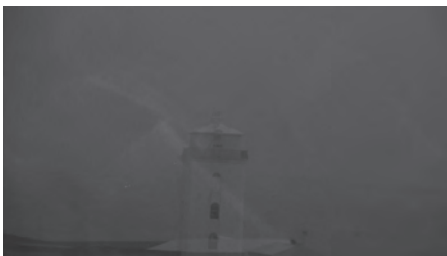


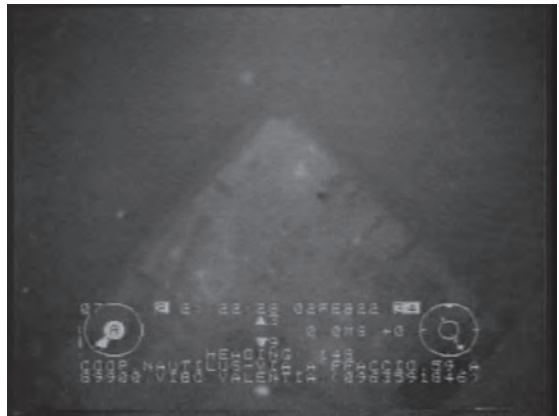
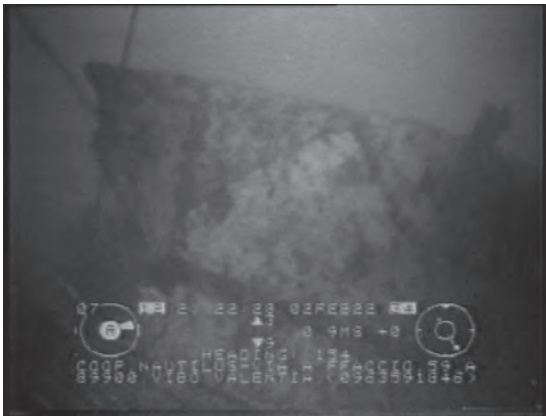
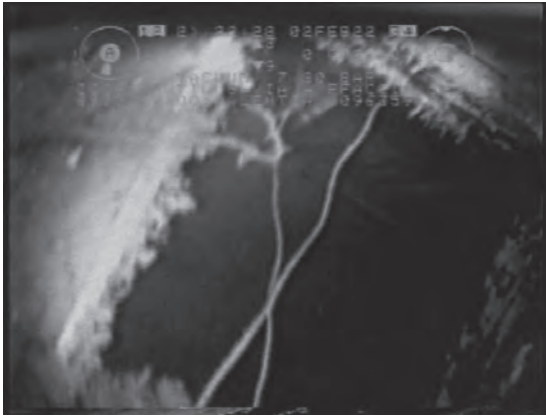
The ghostly forms within the images allude to floating worlds, to the enchantment of industrial machinery and the life of ships ...indefinite and suggestive of place, evoking an archive built by acts of remembering. The video enthusiast's footage of a piece of local history is transformed in this work into vignettes from a fantastical voyage. The work is both about drifting away and coming ashore. The 'knots' of the title can refer both to nautical speed as well as to the complex ties that bind people to histories. Ties hold things together and speed frays them apart. The knots that bind are the knots that fray.¹⁰

The dismantling of the cranes followed by their displacement lets their histories float away from England and into sites on the distant west coast of India, acquiring newer forms and perhaps roles. The footage placed in this curatorial form is not only in the register of the specific voyages that history has not registered, but a reminder for us to think about histories of spaces/places also, in terms of past/lost voyages and found footage.

Voyages in Solid Seas

In a contrasting register of voyages and journeys, the Milan-based collective, Multiplicity, argues that the territorial waters have lost fluidity and become solid around Europe.¹¹ On Christmas night, 1996, a wooden ship which Multiplicity refers as "the ghost ship" sank in the Mediterranean Sea with 283 Tamil, Pakistani and Indian migrants on board, leading to their death.¹² The investigation of the 'ghost ship' project tells us that despite survivor statements and the discovery of human remains in fishermen's nets, the authorities of the countries involved in the sinking denied the tragedy for five years. Proof only came to light with the facts unearthed by the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, which discovered and filmed the wreck with a remote-controlled underwater camera, 19 miles away from the coast of Sicily. Since then, very few developments have taken place and the 283 bodies that sunk with the ship still lie at the bottom of the sea. While no attempts whatsoever were made to recover and identify them, all the passengers of the 'ghost ship' who were drowned in the Mediterranean were considered to be 'missing' by the law.¹³





Stills from *Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship*,
 Multiplicity: Stefano Boeri,
 Maddalena Bregani, Francisca
 Insulza, Francesco Jodice,
 Giovanni La Varra, John
 Palmesino, Giovanni Maria Bellu,
 Maki Gherzi, Paolo Vari, 2002

From this point of reference, the collective postulates:

The Mediterranean is becoming a 'Solid Sea'. A territory ploughed by pre-determined routes, unsurpassable boundaries and subdivided into specialized and strictly regulated bands of water. A solid space, crossed at different depths and with different vectors by clearly distinct fluxes of people, goods, information and money.¹⁴

Whoever enters the Mediterranean today has to acquire a stable identity, and "whether they be immigrants, fisherman, military personnel, cruise passengers, oil platform workers, or beach holiday makers, their 'costumes' will not be abandoned until the end of their journey across the water".¹⁵

Mobility as such, then, can only occur within the paradigms and costumes set in place by the state – that is, as citizen and population. This anticipation of completely formed subjects is conceptually displaced and unsettled by the practices and processes of the contemporary. For instance, take Raqs Media Collective's invocation of figures such as impostors and missing persons, who are not subjects in the complete sense; they exist in a continuous flow of becoming but never actually become. They are figures that are always on the move, in disguise, and cannot be easily looked upon within the categories conceptualised by the

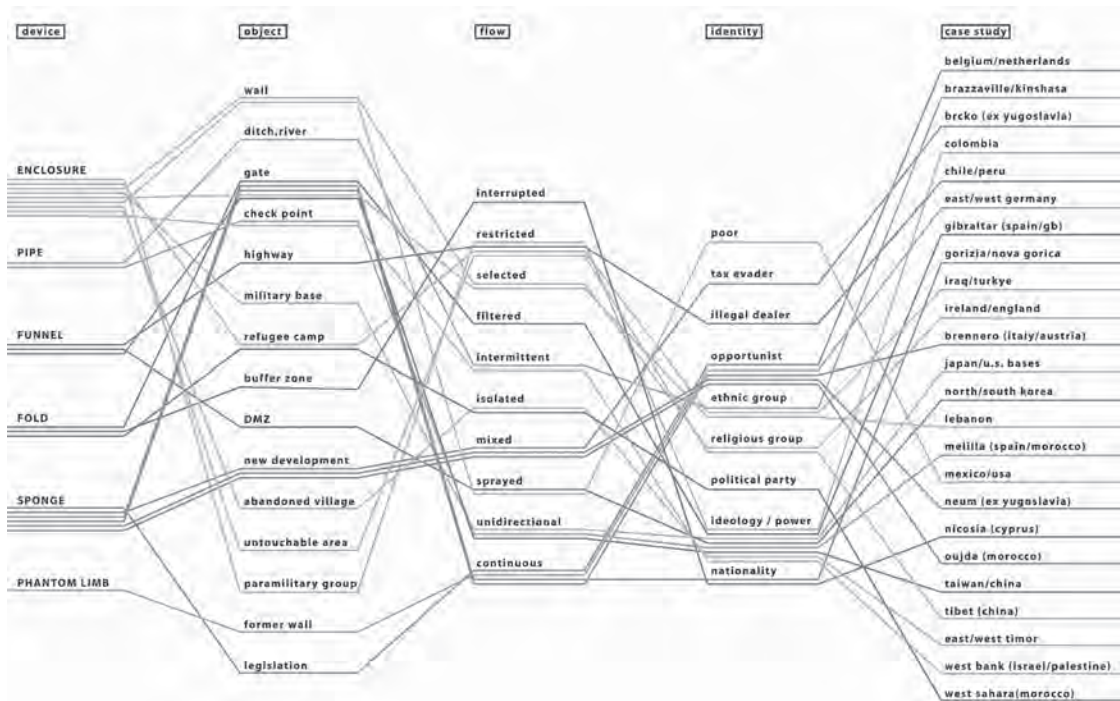
state.¹⁶ “They are not territorially bound; they are everywhere, dispersed – in time, in space. They come and stand in, like spectres, phantoms, more as intruders into the conceptual worlds, messing up neat partitions and legibility”.¹⁷ And as non-subjects or not yet subjects, they point us to directions of unbounding and unsettling existing territorial understandings by postulating conceptual intrusions and teases.

The suggestion of ‘solid sea’, then, leaves us with halts in the flow of territorial waters and subjective formations. The digital is not just a single, homogeneous event like the *tsunami* or the hurricane, but a cluster of continuous occurrences and fluid intensities, of flows, ebbs and whirlpools, not in a defined sequence, but as multiple and contemporaneous interruptions.

Velocities and Flows

In another project that expands the discussion of mobilities, Multiplicity takes our attention to the stories/realities of borders in the Mediterranean that have been continuously reconfigured in the increasing global reorganisation. Under the heading, *Border Device(s)*, Multiplicity looks at boundaries as devised in the forms of Funnels, Pipes, Folds, Sponges, Phantom Limbs

Border Matrix – Border Device(s), a project by Multiplicity: Stefano Boeri, Marco Gentile, Maki Gherzi, Matteo Ghidoni, Sandi Hilal, Isabella Inti, Anniina Koivu, Alessandro Petti, Salvatore Porcaro, Cecilia Pirovano, Francesca Recchia, Eduardo Staszowski, Kasia Teodorczuk, 2003



and Enclosures, a variety of solid passages through which flows of water, people, goods and information are channelised and controlled.

Funnels channel the disorderly flows of objects and individuals to place – along a coast or a border – such as the boats that ferry immigrants between the Mediterranean. Some boundaries are like the impenetrable *Pipes*, like the highways which cross the Israel and Palestine. There are boundaries that emerge between the *Folds* of two territories in conflict, such as the strip of desert cutting through

the Nicosia. Boundaries that are like *Sponges* attract populations and investment to create new communities. Like *Phantom Limbs*, other boundaries continue to function even when they no longer exist. But above all, everywhere in the world there are *Enclosures*: barbed wire or concrete barriers, or mobile ones.¹⁸

Multiplicity's invocation introduces a diversity of passages leading the so-called flows of practices, people, information and goods. They foreground the relationships between the different range of solid entities and their role in channelising and controlling liquid flows. This organisation and movement works quite in contrast to Bauman's proposition that sees global expansion in terms of liquid flows, and where reconfigured forms of solids (as suggested by Multiplicity) still seem to be playing a crucial role.¹⁹

Free Trade and Free Ports

While Multiplicity takes us through how borders are re-conceptualised within the once-utopian space called the Mediterranean, CAMP, an artist's collective based in Mumbai, directs our attention to the free trade routes/relations between Sharjah and Somalia, through their project *Wharfage*.²⁰ "Foregrounding the millennia old nautical ties linking the Gulf, South Asia and East Africa, *Wharfage* recasts the Indian Ocean as a space of connection, communication and exchange".²¹ Invoking the ideas of 'free port' and 'free trade', the project speaks of transacting and sharing goods, traders, sailors and workers between the old ports of Sharjah and Somalia – a collection of semi-state entities. This engagement, as CAMP formulates it, "may offer a few ways to think about how 'business' and the spectral lives of these commodities and traders, point to life beyond war or 'global capital'. With pirates up ahead and economic crisis at their tail, these mountains of goods and their sailors may trace old trade routes, but map out something new: a contemporary landscape of used things, 'break-in-bulk' trade, diasporas, and giant wooden ships being built in Salaya, Gujarat".²²

Wharfage, CAMP
Two-part project for the
9th Sharjah Biennial, 2009



While CAMP references free trade and free ports, Allan Sekula's popular *Fish Story* tells us a tale of the maritime world, labour and, more specifically, the cargo container as the object/sign of capitalism. *Fish Story* speaks of the maritime world as one not only of gargantuan automation, but one that also consists of "isolated, anonymous, hidden work, of great loneliness, displacement and separation from the domestic sphere".²³

Sekula's interest, as he notes, is "to find a social within the sea, as Melville did. *Fish Story* is an 'art historical' study tracing the lineage of the representations of the sea economy from Dutch seventeenth-century painting to the unacknowledged 'objective correlative' of the cargo container found in Minimalist and Pop art, whether it be the Brillo Box of Andy Warhol or the serial cubes of Donald Judd. For shippers who speak of 'intermodality', the box is more important than the vehicle. So, the package begins to assume a life of its own, a kind of ghostly animation".²⁴ Sekula speaks of cargo containers as the "coffin of remote labor power" since the labour that produces these goods is always situated in "the fluid, re-assignable sites determined by the relentless quest for lower wages".²⁵

The art historical referencing of *Fish Story* is taken to a completely new level by *Periferry*,²⁶ a project initiated by Guwahati-based Desire Machine Collective that transformed a ferry into a physical site of their artistic process and collaboration.²⁷ This floating/solid space/place currently acts as a discursive laboratory facilitating latent philosophical and artistic worldviews. Formerly known as *M.V. Chandardinga*, this vessel was run by the Department of Inland Water Transport, Government of Assam, to ferry people across the river Brahmaputra and also for transporting goods to many places on National Waterway 2.²⁸

Periferry,
Desire Machine Collective,
2007 - ongoing



The attempt of the project, *Periferry*, has been "to restore the ferry into a media lab using renewable energy sources and eco-friendly material".²⁹ It is also considered to be a turning point to look differently at the floating relations of inland water transport on the Brahmaputra, an important water channel connecting Tibet, China, India and Bangladesh.³⁰ The context of the project is largely situated in the ferry docked on the river – an 'in between' space, where

many places and experiences meet to open up a dialogue, produce collaborations, articulate resistances, precisely fuelling various kinds of public and private engagements.³¹

Conclusion

In the discontinuous relationship with fluids and solids, the digital can be mapped both as a life-expanding and a life-threatening combination of forces. The practices of the digital take up the task of water diviners tracking fault lines, trapped fluids, seismic zones and even border matrices.

The logic of looking at the sea or other water bodies as conceptual sites of the social, where transformations can be mapped, realised and argued, is seen as the impulse of contemporaneity that the above-cited practices share. Bauman's proposition of the fluid reorganisation of power and capital, flowing beyond the barriers and borders of the state, is contested in Multiplicity's thesis by pointing our attention to the solid passages that direct and govern the velocities of flows. In a world that is increasingly communicating through the digital, border devices are relocated to newer sites, where passwords and plug-ins appear as extended forms of control and surveillance. Yet, the free ports and trade of and on wooden *dhow*s continues, not so affected by the changes of contemporary global capital; ferries get mobilised as *Periferrys*, for alternative artistic and philosophical imaginations. In a nutshell, all the fishes, all the ships, have different stories to tell, of being and belonging, and of politics and possibilities. ■

Notes

- 1 Ravi Sundaram. Referred to in Monica Narula, "Sarai – One Year in the Public Domain". In **Television & New Media** 3(4), pp. 404-412 (November 2002).
- 2 In its strict technological definition, digital is understood to be a technological system that converts and produces different forms of information, images, audio and video into discrete and discontinuous data values.
- 3 Zygmunt Bauman. "Foreword: On Being Light and Liquid". In **Liquid Modernity** (Polity, 2000, Cambridge), p. 6
- 4 Ibid., p.13, 14.
- 5 Reviews by Nicholas Gane on: "Zygmunt Bauman: Liquid Modernity and Beyond"; "Liquid Modernity by Zygmunt Bauman"; "The Individualized Society by Zygmunt Bauman"; "The Bauman Reader by Zygmunt Bauman". **Acta Sociologica** 44(3), pp. 267-275 (2001).
- 6 This particular definition of territorial waters is made by the 1982 "United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea". For an elaborate discussion on territorial waters, see Percy Thomas Fenn, "Origins of the Theory of Territorial Waters", **The American Journal of International Law** 20(3), pp. 465-482 (July 1926).
- 7 Parul Dave Mukherji. "Classroom and the Plane of the Contemporary". In (ed.), Philip Monk, **Raqs Media Collective: A Case Book** (AGYU, forthcoming, Toronto).
- 8 Irit Rogoff. "Smuggling: An Embodied Criticality". Available at: <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en> (last accessed 10 July 2012).
- 9 Raqs Media Collective. **The Great Bare Mat & Constellation**, Gardner Museum, Boston, 2013. Available at: http://www.gardnermuseum.org/contemporary_art/exhibitions/past_exhibitions/great_bare_mat_and_constellation (last accessed 16 March 2013).
- 10 Raqs Media Collective. **The Knots that Bind are the Knots that Fray**, Baltic Gateshead, New Castle, 2010. <http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/resultCC.aspx?id=63&type=works> (last accessed 12 April 2012).
- 11 See <http://www.installationart.net/Chapter3Interaction/interaction05.html> (last accessed 16 March 2013).

- 12 *Multiplicity*. **The Ghost Ship**, Documenta 11, Kassel, 2002. See <http://www.multiplicity.it/index2.htm> (last accessed 12 March 2013).
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 *Multiplicity*. "ID: A Journey through a Solid Sea". In **Artists Writing/Project Proposals for Documenta 11**, Documenta 11 Platform 5: Exhibition Catalogue (Hatze Cantz Publishers, 2002, Kassel), p. 577.
- 16 Raqs Media Collective. **Impostor in the Waiting Room**, Bose Pacia Gallery, New York, 2004. Available at: <http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/resultCC.aspx?id=92&type=works> (last accessed 10 July 2012).
- 17 Raqs Media Collective. "Concept Intruder". In **Raqs Media Collective: A Case Book**, op. cit.
- 18 *Multiplicity*. **Border Matrix**. Available at: <http://www.multiplicity.it/index2.htm> (last accessed 30 June 2012).
- 19 This perception further directs our attention towards culverts, sluices and conduits – some of the very common solid channels and structures used to channelise different velocities of liquid flows.
- 20 CAMP. **Wharfage**, a two-part project for the 9th Sharjah Biennial, 2009. Available at: <http://computer.org/event.php?id=77> (last accessed 16 March, 2013).
- 21 Murtaza Vali. "CAMP's Wharfage Project: Recasting the Indian Ocean as a Space of Contact and Exchange". In **Art East**, 1 November 2009. Available at: http://www.arteeast.org/pages/across_history/265/ (last accessed 20 May 2012).
- 22 CAMP. **Wharfage 2008-2009**. This publication accompanied a series of radio broadcasts at the Sharjah Creek. From 18-21 March 2009, one could tune in to Radio Meena on 100.3 FM, within a radius of about two km from the port. The project was conceived as part of **Past of Coming Days**, a programme curated by Tarek Abou el Fetouh for the 9th Sharjah Biennial, 2009.
- 23 Allan Sekula. "Fish Story: Notes on Work". In **Artists Writing/Project Proposals for Documenta 11**, op. cit., p. 582.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Desire Machine Collective. "Vision". In **Periferry 1.0**. Available at: http://periferry.in/about_vision.html (last accessed 16 March, 2013).
- 27 Desire Machine Collective. "Spaces", In **Periferry 1.0**. Available at [http://www.periferry.in/about/about_spaces.html](http://www.periferry.in/about_about_spaces.html) (last accessed 12 March 2013).
- 28 The river Brahmaputra, having a length of 891 km between the Bangladesh Border and Sadiya, was declared National Waterway No. 2 on 1 September 1988.
- 29 Desire Machine Collective. "Spaces", op. cit.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Desire Machine Collective. "Vision", op. cit; "Desiring Machines", in **Art India XVI (III)**, pp.40-43 (Quarter III, 2011-2012).

PROJECTING TAMBAKU CHAAKILA OOB ALI

REFLECTIONS TOWARDS A VERSATILE ARCHIVE OF POLITICAL CINEMAS

Nicole Wolf

One day after lunch the women workers of the Kurbetty factory reached the workshop late by a few minutes. The employer [malik] kicked them out and closed the door. The women touched his feet so many times and pleaded him, 'please let us in', and that they will work 10 minutes extra in the evening. But then you had to expect him to listen – he sat in his car and left. Everything has its limit and they asked the foreman [mistry] to let the women working inside come out. And together they sat outside the main gate of the factory. This news spread like fire in the village. That evening when we walked home after work, we saw the women still sitting there, outside the factory. When we reached them, they talked to us about how their situation and our situation was the same, and that our boss is taking advantage of our helplessness. 'Why don't we all together think about a solution?' Throughout our way we thought about how, yes, they were right, what they were saying is absolutely right.

Female voice-over,
Tambaku Chaakila Oob Ali, 1982¹

Now when I look back at it, in every aspect of that process, it was really working on a position of creating political affiliations... How do we present our project to the people we want to film with? What we had to create every time was where you are politically and where they are and what is our meeting ground. Is there trust? Is there political trust?... That had to be negotiated. Which way could they use the film, or not? Did they want their situation recorded or not? So it was developing a documentary practice, and it was creating theory about those politics while we did the practice. How do you frame women as workers?

Deepa Dhanraj, 19 December 2009²

For it is an irretrievable picture of the past, which threatens to disappear with every present, which does not recognize itself as meant in it

Walter Benjamin, from Theses VI of
"On the Concept of History"

T*ambaku Chaakila Oob Ali* (1982) is a film I encountered first and for some time thereafter only as a vivid memory from a time past. For many years, I knew of this 25 min, 16mm film through imaginations of recollected stories about it shared by Deepa Dhanraj of the film collective, Yugantar.³ I saw this film as a screening event on a blocked highway near Nipani, in Belgaum, Karnataka, where 3,000 people created a circle around an improvised screen, obliging even truck drivers to stop. I also carry images in my head from a midnight rough-cut screening, offered in a local cinema for free in support of the female tobacco workers' cause, to an audience of 2,000 people, who asked to see the footage again and again and debated it until three that morning.

The stress on open-ended process, on aliveness, on needing to ask questions not previously raised, but also the cheekiness and excitement of the narrative to me matched with the fact that for a long time I could not actually see *Tambaku Chaakila Oob Ali*, due to the fragile state of its materiality and its consisting of a print canned and stored in a cellar. Remembering the film always included references to a political climate both burdened by the restriction of civil rights during and around the Emergency and simultaneously energised through the emerging social and political movements of the late 1970s and early 80s, most crucially the autonomous women's movement. At the same time, there was the necessity to constantly negotiate and contest a set vocabulary, and each screening was part of existing and ensuing political processes of organising and unionising, throughout the three years it was extensively shown in different parts of India to women working in the informal sector, in both urban and rural areas (four language versions of the film existed – Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Hindi).

In the absence of a ready-made film – which, one might argue, could but re-present this event without allowing for contingency, the various layers of information, the affective memories and reflections in hindsight that accumulate through conversations taken up time and again – I could concentrate

on how the film's circumstances were narrated, and fantasise on how this film-political event might productively repeat itself whenever actualised through a screening. I always connected to a sense of newness and excitement, as well as to a contemplative ambivalence towards the kind of images one had created, a self-critical stance underlined by an understanding of the contextual limitations of the then possible perceptions of the political, of women, work, labour and union politics, and its relation to other realms of subject formation. Memories, projections and the meeting of past and present political desires and urgencies strengthened the unquestioned need to give a projection space to this film now, in the present. At the same time, a caution arose that the film might too much belong to its own time, and that seeing it removed from the context it was made in and for would create a distance by enhancing its pastness.

How does one re-project in order to throw forward? How to contextualise without attempting to authenticate?

Could something new get created if we respect our relative distance to the contextual circumstances of film-political events while acknowledging our drive to project current political desires onto moments recounted as episodes of radical change?⁴ What are those energies that one is seeking to re-animate? I was too young and geopolitically removed from when and where these films were made to pick up easy associations, and yet engaging with those collective film events suggests associations to a past when political film practices engendered international affiliations that are evocative for thinking how we might affiliate ourselves today. Are there specific constellations in the present – urgencies, stagnations, a search for radicality – that are conducive to the surfacing of past moments? Furthermore, how do I write with this history not as its author, not as a story of rescue, but working with the demands that diverse pasts make on us through the spaces of the possibles they imagined and created? I suggest that these spaces must not be trapped within judgements of achievement or failure, nor must they

be rewritten to idealise, but – with a Benjaminian urgency – we might want to restore their potential for subversion and transformation in order to alter our perspective on the possibles of the present. Linking to the archives of feminist film seems particularly pertinent now, if not always.

More concretely, these initial personal reflections are meant to take part in creating material, public and discursive projection spaces for *Tambaku Chaakila Oob Ali* as well as for *Molkarin (Maid Servant, 1981)* and *Idhi Kata Matramena (Is This Just a Story, 1983)*, all three produced by Yugantar in collaboration with grassroots women's groups.⁵

Film-Materialities and Agency

I finally watched all the available Yugantar material on a Steenbeck at the Arsenal film archive. Moving several kilos of prints and tapes from place to place was like transporting very precious objects that attain their own life. As the only surviving material, they mustn't be lost; they were wrapped in many layers; they were carried with much care in hand luggage; in the archive, they had to be stored apart from the rest of the films as they suffered from the infectious vinegar syndrome; they are touched with gloves and washed to make sure they move smoothly on the Steenbeck. There was a peculiar relation between the actual and very fragile film material, the narrations I had heard until then and my imaginations. It was difficult not to be moved seeing that print, which had had a rather clandestine existence for some time, move along a Steenbeck, the projection of its black-and-white images filled with scratches – visible traces of how the prints had been transported on local buses, screened and re-wound numerous times through different 16mm projectors. Again, it seems too easy a parallel to connect the precarity of the state of the film material, its age literally embodied through the many vertical lines, to the precarity of a political struggle. At the same time, I wondered what the material demands of this film were. How would it want to be restored? Does the 16mm celluloid print ask for being

touched up, made to look good, with almost no scars? Might one want to retain the traces time left on it, or would this again be an attempt to authenticate the pastness of the film? Can those particular textures of aging celluloid be thought of otherwise than as representational? And what is now the status of a singular print versus its digital copy that can multiply and circulate unregulated, online or through DVD copies, to create friendships and familial relations when being part of the many 'poor images'⁶ with which it might share a lot? A digital copy that is watchable again and again, and that allows for the creation of multiple film events, appeared to permit another, more active relationship to the film, a working relationship, maybe liberated from the slightly paralysing awe I felt towards the print's materiality and the paraphernalia around it.

Towards a Feminist Third Cinema

Even a dog sits in one place and eats peacefully, but we don't have this kind of luck. Every day we wake up early in the morning, we clean, we make bread, we wake up our children, we wrap our lunch in *rotis*, and then we run to the workshop. Eating lunch calmly is far from our reality, if you get to eat a few bites on your way, you are fortunate. If you reach the workshop at 8 a.m. it's ok, but if you are five minutes late, then the employer won't let you in and you have to spend a whole day out in the sun.

Female voice-over, *Tambaku Chaakila Oob Ali*

We were also trying to build working-class heroines.

Deepa Dhanraj, 7 June 2002

Tambaku Chaakila Oob Ali could be thought of as being affiliated with different kinds of political cinemas. It is a feminist collective's film; a collaborative film; a consciousness-

raising film; a film on violence against women; a film on solidarity, on organising, on unionising, on leaderships, on how to give evidence to injustice and on how to address the testimonial as a multiple voice that includes the singular. *Tambaku* is also a factory film. And if it can be said that the history of cinema is complicit in neglecting to bring the conditions inside the factory, literally, to light, *Tambaku* is one of several exceptions that add to our understanding of the relation between cinema and our perception of labour, work, the factory and its many discontents.⁷ As a factory film, *Tambaku* can evocatively be linked to the beginning of cinematic projections in India as well as elsewhere, namely the screening of the Lumière brothers' *Workers Leaving a Factory*. Claiming this link embeds the history of grassroots filmmaking within the history of a cinema which most often started its storytelling from the moment the singular person exits the factory, cinematic lives being the ones that leave the factory behind. Harun Farocki says as much in his essay film, *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995, 36 min), when he provides us with an image archaeology – sifting through the archives of European and US cinema history – which seeks to think through the many cinematic sequences that imitate repetitively the motif of the first staged documentary film.⁸

Workers are seen running away from the factory, Farocki comments through his voice-over, “as if they had already lost too much time”. *Tambaku* opens with the women labourers walking hastily towards the factory. At the gate, they are awaited by their supervisor who lets them in, one by one, reminiscent of the reversal of the inaugural factory scene, i.e. workers entering the factory before we lose sight of their individual bodies and they become part of a workforce.

Time, next to the continuous stress on unity, is one of the conceptual aspects that strike me when I watch *Tambaku* now, and that align it to other, also more recent, factory films.⁹ Time is being structured and given by someone else's sense or commandment of time.

“For the world it is 2 p.m., but on our employer's watch it is 12 o'clock”.

“When the time for our bonus came, we got to know that even if we had worked for eight to ten months, *malik* had marked our attendance for only two and a half months”.

Keeping account of their days of work, in their own notebooks, becomes part of resistance strategy. Having just a little more time at one's disposal, a sense that one's time is not stolen but respected, leads to a different understanding of oneself, of one's labour and of time that is other than work, even if momentarily.

“You know, we felt as if we were reborn. Now we sit calmly and eat hot bread. From now on, it's a happy ending. We could reach home at sunset; we could spend our day with our men and children”.

The relation between time, work, labour and subjecthood reverberates through the images and connects the different parts of the film, one within the factory creating a concept of work and one outside the factory constructing a concept of organising.

In *Tambaku* we accompany the women workers right from the entrance into the factory, rather than leaving them at the gate. While brief, the following sequences are remarkable, not only because the tobacco factories were difficult to access (the owner permitted the team only five hours to film, and that under supervision by factory workers deputed to point out what they were allowed to film) and the conditions inside the workshop made breathing hard for those unaccustomed to tobacco dust, but more importantly, those images *inside* take part in the creation of a perception of factory work which seems to bring together elements of fordist production lines, exploitative feudal relations between land and factory owners, the insecurities of the informal sector and the ensuing unionising processes. By watching the steps required to move from tobacco leaf to fine tobacco, all necessitating the women to work out a common rhythmic pace that allows for a continuous flow of materials, we see

the concept of a female workforce developed while it is also interrupted with brief close-ups of individual women workers.

"Film can reproduce images of labouring, but 'work' is an economic and social concept, and hence must be signified as such to distinguish it from human activity that is held to be nonwork".¹⁰ *Tambaku* leads us literally into the factory and 'fabricates' a concept of work that, one could argue, did not have visual expression at that particular moment in time.¹¹

Deepa Dhanraj stressed that what was new and exciting but also an urgent challenge at the time was the lack of a cinematic repertoire of poor women speaking to power. The discursive context on the level of perception was one that would show working-class *adivasi* or *devdasi* women as mainly sexual objects or as beneficiaries of the state which was preventing them, as mothers with numerous children, from starving. On the other hand, did the political discourse that Yugantar and the women's wings of Communist or Marxist groups offered provide visual and conceptual images of the worker, the working class and of working class women?

If Cowie rightly argues that documentary is a "discursive practice" in the sense given to this term by Michel Foucault, for it is not only a discursive construction but also a constructing discourse",¹² then how did *Tambaku's* fabrication of work take part in the construction of a discourse on work? How did the many filmic events that took place through the making and showing of *Tambaku* engender a film and political language that needed to be found in that very moment, and how might it in turn have been part of expanding the discursive framing of political discourses at the time? How does it make another real possible? Then or now?

Deepa Dhanraj recounts very critically all the omissions she could see clearly in hindsight and how these were framed by the political vocabulary and the filmmakers' own backgrounds at the time. Foregrounding work led to not being able to listen to stories of violence in women's homes, not stressing the fact that most of the women workers were *devdasis*, and some were Muslim, or not addressing the fact

that the women's union was led by a man, Subash Joshi.¹³ Further, we do not hear about frictions between women; about what was needed to attain and stay with the much-stressed sense of unity? How were divides provoked through caste and religion played out and addressed?¹⁴

On the other hand, an existing vocabulary was expanded through just the mere presence of working class women on screen, acting as a collective body, not as victims and not isolated. The voice-over and two speeches by women addressing women stress that "not at any cost should this unity break". Following from the collectivity as the condition of the production line, which is also underlined by the worker's songs, *Tambaku* moves to stressing collectivity in organising and maintaining a political struggle. "If a woman amongst us gets scared, others should give her strength", is supported by a succession of images of women's bodies eating together, drinking tea together, sleeping outside next to each other, listening to speeches together, walking together, hence sequence by sequence creating a concept of organising.

Voice connects these images, but neither as an expository voice-over standing in for the filmmaker, nor through a voice of a particular worker giving testimony; *Tambaku* appears to resist the patronising act of 'giving a voice'. The voice-over is a personal and subjective one that however embodies a collective testimony. The Yugantar filmmakers recorded the stories of many women and used those stories to first decide on the kinds of scenes to portray, and literally montaged the voice-over together from different testimonies.

This working process was complemented by recordings of comments during rough cut screenings which were then incorporated into the final voice-over. The result is a subjective and direct address that is yet not an individual's voice, a practice which addresses the difficult translation process from experience to speech act and avoids the drive for authenticity attached to embodied testimony.¹⁵

It is also an evocative, and one might argue feminist, expansion of the use of voice, incorporating workers' testimonies and creating a cinematic direct address, as practised in one of the classic Militant Cinema examples, *Hours of the Furnaces*.

Yugantar's third and last film broadens the political vocabulary further. Their fiction film *Yeh Sirf Kahani Nahi Hai* (*This is Not Just a Story*, 1983) – made with lay actors – moves precisely into the before-neglected middle class family, addressing nuances of violence within the context of home as well as gesturing towards political solidarity through female friendship.

Projections We Make

Responding to Yugantar's work, presented here only in preliminary sketch, strikes me as productive. For the multilayered events it signifies in and of itself, for its participation in a crucial moment of movements reflecting and consolidating their political trajectories, for what it introduced into a history of feminist documentary filmmaking in India that continued to extend conceptions of film-political language as such, and for the redress of archives of feminist film practice in Europe.

Furthermore, concepts of work, time, solidarity and participation might be some of the vocabulary that projecting *Tambaku Chaakila Oob Ali* might throw forward. All of these seem too grand and general to be addressed here, and at the same time they are terms and conditions precarious and under pressure now, if otherwise. Could re-projecting *Tambaku*, without ossifying it, participate in re-activating those terms? Its film process, pioneering at its time and place, calls for links to current experimentations with documentary and evidential modalities. Its politics I imagine, and project, as made through the possibles of a Benjaminian 'now-time' that we need for finding new forms of political agency and new paths of how we might want to address work and take care of our time. ■

Notes

- 1 Chhaya Datar (1989) recounts that same incident in her dissertation research conducted during the mid-80s. See Chhaya Datar, **Waging Change: Women Tobacco Workers in Nipani Organise** (Kali for Women, 1989, New Delhi), p 9.
- 2 The following descriptions of the filmmaking and showing processes are based on conversations with Deepa Dhanraj that took place between 1999 and 2012. This text thus was solely made possible through Deepa Dhanraj sharing her experiences and thoughts, while I take full responsibility for any mistakes or mis-readings. During 'Persistence Resistance: Documentary

Practices in India', a one-week festival and discussion forum that took place in London in October/November 2011, Deepa Dhanraj brought whatever Yugantar film material she had found still available, and we watched parts of her 16mm copies during one of the sessions where she contextualised and commented on the excerpts we saw. For her too, as the director, this was the first time she reviewed those films after they had been dormant since the mid-80s. The London edition of 'Persistence Resistance' was made possible through the team of Magic Lantern (New Delhi), particularly the continuous efforts of Gargi Sen, all of whom I would like to thank here.

- 3 Yugantar was founded in 1980 by Abha Baiya, Navroze Contractor, Deepa Dhanraj and Meera Rao. **Tambaku Chaakila Oob Ali** was their second film after **Molkarin**, which concentrated on maid servants in Pune organising to demand better working conditions.
- 4 Eshun and Gray (2011) take a similar approach in their discussion and re-animation of what they call 'The Militant Image'. The film political works that their edited special issue refers to are mostly coming out of processes that have been declared revolutions and liberation struggles on the level of postcolonial nation states. The labour and feminist politics I refer to here are smaller in their ambition, but, as I describe further below, the filmmaking and screening practice has concrete links to Third and Militant Cinema understandings of film as a political tool. See "The Militant Image: A Cine Geography", Editors' Introduction, in (eds.) Kodwo Eshun and Ros Gray, **The Militant Image: A Cine Geography**, a special issue of **Third Text** 25(1), pp. 1-12 (January 2011).
- 5 As participant of the project 'Living Archive: Archive Work as a Contemporary Artistic and Curatorial Practice', situated at the Berlin-based Arsenal: Institute for Film and Video Art (<http://www.arsenal-berlin.de/en/living-archive/about-living-archive.html>), I have the opportunity to work with Deepa Dhanraj on the digitisation and restoration of all Yugantar films as well as **Kya Hua Is Shahar Ko? (What Happened to This City?)** 1986). This process includes conversations with people involved in the making and showing of these films at the time, as well as workshop situations with participants of various backgrounds and generations.
- 6 Hito Steyerl. "In Defense of the Poor Image". In **e-flux** 10 (November 2009).
- 7 I would like to acknowledge Manu Ramos' PhD research and in particular his unpublished chapter "Factory Trouble – Postfordist Cinema and Industrial Transformation", which has been inspirational to my thinking.
- 8 Harun Farocki. "Workers Leaving the Factory". In Harun Farocki, (ed.) Thomas Elsaesser, **Working on the Sightlines** (Amsterdam University Press, 2004, Amsterdam).
- 9 In Surabhi Sharma's film, **Jari Mari: Of Cloth and Other Stories** (2001), time and numbers permeate the post-factory city, Mumbai, where women and men assemble, take apart, pack or add other aspects within the many informal production lines.
- 10 Elisabeth Cowie. "Working Images: Representing Work and Voicing the Ordinary". In **Recording Reality, Desiring the Real** (University of Minnesota Press, 2011, Minneapolis, London), p. 46.
- 11 Ibid., p. 47.
- 12 Ibid., p. 50.
- 13 Datar (1985) writes about how she was welcomed by one of the Nipani unions to conduct her research, but how stress was put that theirs was a workers' organisation, not a women's organisation.
- 14 Chhaya Datar. "Divisions and Unity: Dynamics of Organizing Bidi and Tobacco Workers". In **Manushi** 39, 1986.
- 15 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) classic critique of Foucault and Deleuze's othering of the labourer, bringing the authentic subject back into their discourse by claiming that 'they can speak for themselves and they also do it very well', seems a relevant reminder. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In (eds.) Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson, **Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture**, (University of Illinois Press, 1988, Urbana, Ill.), pp. 271-313.

FOR THE CITY YET TO COME: PLANNING'S NEW VISUAL CULTURE

Joshua Neves

We are already acclimated to a new digital rhetoric that animates, seduces, and promises the city yet to come – telescoping past and future into a con/fused spacetime that is neither here nor there. Lush images saturated with pinks, oranges, greens, blues and science fiction silvers project new urban districts, concrete and fibre optic infrastructures, a stadium, perhaps a museum or an opera house, occasionally a pilot project for new public housing (without enough funding to be realised). The images are everywhere, taking new and old material forms: from LED screens to low-res print. Their projections seem familiar but announce departures and arrivals: another blueprint, a new developmental time zone. They say that this smiling techno-verdant future would have been impossible to design before the new software; it generates forms unimaginable to the human eye/hand. In its wake, the proximate and everyday rhythms and architectures must go. The informal is too risky: these quasi-legal vegetable stalls, phone stands, bengbeng taxis or houses can't stay here without a permit. The video shops will have to be shut down. It has to be done. There aren't enough toilets here, and the electricity is spotty, probably stolen. And the rains are coming. This new project will unite us. It is expensive; but it will turn us into an image, into reproducibility itself. Just think of the postcards, the visitors, the cinematic numbers. That street will be artists – the cafés! – and over there, a high-tech district. We are going to turn this place into a creative capital, another –ollywood, design cluster or maybe a silicon glen. We have to be innovative. We need to fix the water, the garbage, the traffic, the clinic, the violence, the horrific gap in the access to life worlds. We need to catch up. But first this picture, this projection of the city yet to come...



Developing

Thus, cities remain, at least ‘officially,’ inscribed in a narrative of development. But development as a specific modality of temporality is not simply about meeting the needs of citizens. It is also about capturing the residents to a life aesthetic defined by the state so that they can be citizens.

AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City Yet to Come*¹

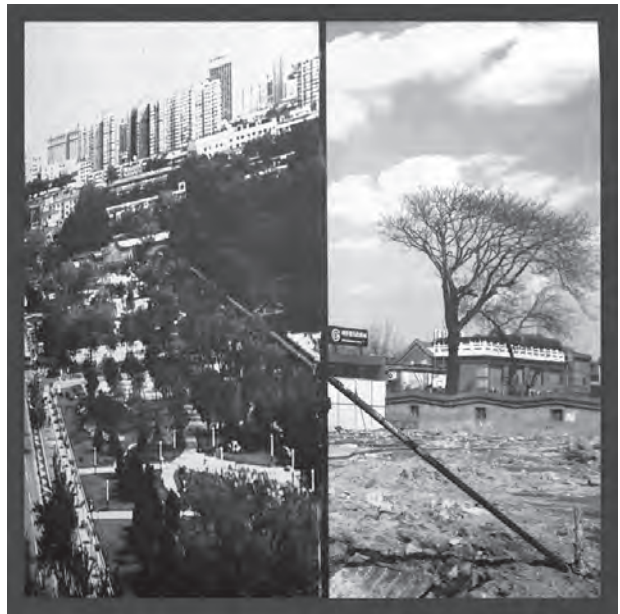
Fig. 1: A Beijing construction site billboard projects the future city
PHOTO: GRAHAM BURY

Images of the projected city are part of the architecture of the everyday – they are spectacularly mundane. They fill our magazines, newspapers and books, the Internet, T-shirts, posters, art galleries, brochures, billboards, new planning museums, TV documentaries and fantasy films, our hospitals, sidewalks and trains. Johannesburg to Bangalore, Boston to Beijing. In what follows, I offer some speculations on planning’s visual culture – and, in particular, what I am calling counter-planning practices. These speculations draw on research related to my current book project examining media, urbanism and political society in Olympic-era Beijing. While certainly rooted in that context, my arguments here also point to thicker global processes and projections. They signal issues specific to hegemonic forms of globalisation – and counter-globalisations – and thus are not limited to the Global South or North, but intrinsic to what Boaventura de Sousa Santos terms “globalisations”.² Globalisations, in the plural, help us to recast the notion of a singular modernising thrust – a modality that confuses its own claims for descriptions.³ One key slippage in globalisation rhetoric is what de Sousa Santos refers to as the “disappearance of the South”.⁴ This disappearance is part of a political shift in the understandings of space and time, where structural inequities are dissolved into a new proscriptive teleology. Planning’s visual culture, its photographic-cum-digital logics, is tethered to this imagination of *developing* – while also being iconic and idiomatic in ways that make it ripe for marginal or popular recycling or resignification.

The first definition of ‘projection’ given in the *OED* is that of alchemy: “The throwing or casting of an ingredient into a crucible”, as in the “transmutation of metals”. This definition points to the severe trial or heat of the crucible, but also the magical processes of the philosopher’s stone and, more specifically, the transformation of one thing into another – an ontological metamorphosis. The alchemy or projection at issue here is both the transformation of everyday space into an image *and* the temporal delay animated by urban renderings: projections thrust and defer the present into the future. In short, design’s visual culture permeates everyday life by consolidating an aesthetics of development or progress (just browse any architecture or design website to see this conventionally cutting-edge visually), and reinforcing neoliberal modes as the inevitable pathway to development – a term that itself conflates modernisation with the improvement of standards of living.

This process – development’s developmentalism – is complicated by the cyanotype pictured in Fig. 2. The image is one example among many from a collaborative research/creative project examining Beijing’s media urbanism.⁵ The photographs-cum-cyanotypes quite literally transform the street-level view of the city in transition into a blueprint. That is,

Fig. 2: Urban projections in Beijing’s Dongcheng district,
flattening urban beautification fencing
on the left, a razed construction site, right
PHOTO: GRAHAM BURY, 2008
HANDMADE CYANOTYPE: GRAHAM BURY
AND JOSHUA NEVES, 2010



they make use of the blueprint’s chemistry to project the city as a two-dimensional schema marked by a limited tonal range, shallow depth, soft focus and ease of reproducibility. In this regard, the handmade cyanotypes are a way of making use of my research archive to *demonstrate* the ‘New Beijing’ (*xin Beijing*). *Demonstration* in this context is supplemental: a mode of observing, indicating and theorising. It is an approach that aims for *more* than analysis by gesturing to a certain atmospherics, feeling or imagination that is vanished by analytical distance. Printing high-resolution colour images in the bluish tint of ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide reproduces the flattened aesthetic and mode of address that both defines future projections of the city and is rooted in design’s sensorium. This act of developing also highlights the nuances of the concept of development as a “gradual unfolding, a bringing into fuller view” that presupposes a latent state that can be made to appear (*OED*).

China's re-emergence into the 'Pacific century' is, on the one hand, widely understood as a fulfilment of this always already present potential and, on the other hand, seen as a protrusion (to signal another register of projection) that is out-of-sync or lagging behind benevolent Northern globalisation.

Seepage and Counter-Planning

The logic of developing and of the blueprint not only reproduces official "modalities of temporality", as Simone observes, but also makes possible new capacities in political culture – producing a kind of aesthetic and/or technological seepage. I borrow the concept of 'seepage' from the Raqs Media Collective to describe the ways that projections become porous or contagious. They write:

By seepage, we mean the action of many currents of fluid material leaching on to a stable structure, entering and spreading through it by way of pores. Until, it becomes a part of the structure, both in terms of its surface, and at the same time continues to act on its core, to gradually disaggregate its solidity. To crumble it over time with moisture. In a wider sense, seepage can be conceived as those acts that ooze through the pores of the outer surfaces of structures into available pores within the structure, and result in a weakening of the structure itself.⁶

For my purposes, seepage is a way to think about how various social actors utilise media technologies to enter into and make use of official apparatuses like projections or master plans. My argument is that design's visual culture – rooted in official planning strategies, new emphases on the creative industries, and global media economies – has been penetrated by alternative imaginations. These modes draw on the very basic idea, repeated endlessly in and about the city, that social forms are mutable and can be reengineered to work and feel differently. As such, designing the future has emerged as a popular cultural practice in variegated locales like the one at issue here – contemporary China: an era that is itself largely defined through prisms of planning and re-presentation.

Consider Beijing-based architecture firm MAD's proposal, *Beijing 2050*, first exhibited at the 2006 Venice Architecture Biennale. The exhibition projects three visions for the future of Beijing – a park in Tiananmen Square, floating islands above the Central Business District, and *hutong* bubbles, small-scale interventions into life in Beijing's inner city. The proposal asserts: "Beijing has a history of short term futures", and traces a series of shortsighted scenarios from the 10 Great Buildings of 1959 to the intense construction of the Olympic era.⁷ In contrast to instant designs, the year 2050 suggests a turn away from the short-term planning that has defined several generations of socialist and post-socialist urban design to think about the city's future *after* the present. In addition to the obvious critique on the symbolic space of the Square, the project also pushes environmental lip service to the extreme, transforming the centre of the city into a 'People's Park'. Here the political address of Mao's portrait and state monuments are disappeared into a green future that uncannily resembles many official projections and landscapes.

In addition to challenging the rhetoric of the master plan, *Beijing 2050* criticises recent visions of modernisation as a mode of imaginary self-colonisation. Floating islands above the CBD are thus conceptual projections whose aim is to explode a certain developmental rut. MAD's proposal claims:

Yet, as China begins to leapfrog the west in terms of development, this vision is increasingly irrelevant. Instead of simply imitating western downtowns, we need

to create a city centre for a new post-western, post-industrial society. In the midst of segregated and competing glass boxes, we propose a floating island above the city, where digital studios, restaurants, multi-media business centres and government functions are horizontally linked. The floating island emphasises the economic trends of tomorrow: connectivity and interdependence.⁸

MAD's future city – presented in models, renderings and perspective diagrams – thus enters contemporary debates and visual cultures through the very design strategies that drive urban development. In this regard, they do not mark a radical departure, but seep into recognisable and everyday urban design strategies.

Photographer Xing Danwen also utilises planning's projective tools to enter into the alchemy of urban design. In *Urban Fiction* (*Dushi yanyi*), an ongoing project begun in 2004, the artist photographs models and maquettes used to promote real estate developments in order to create narratives about emerging forms of urban life. In fact, many of the models that she photographed are now completed structures. Xing's work comes in post-production, where



she transforms the miniatures into stories about model living, into *urban fictions*, including digitally manipulated images of herself occupying these potential structures. The scenes range from the mundane – residents putting on makeup, talking on the phone, floating in the pool, playing tennis and shopping – to the extraordinary. Fig. 4, for example, shows Xing standing on the edge of a high-rise. Other fictions depict a lover's quarrel involving a butcher's knife, car accidents and scenes of intense isolation. She asserts: "The models of these new living spaces are perfect, clean and beautiful but they are also so empty and detached of human drama. When you take these models and begin to add real life – even a single drop of it – so much changes".⁹

Xing's works, among other projects like Cao Fei's *RMB City* (2008-), Zhan Wang's *Urban Landscape – New Beijing* (2003-2007), Feng Mengbo's *Into the City* (2004), Shi Guorui's *New Beijing CBD* (2007), Ai Weiwei's *Map of China* (2003), Lu Hao's *Beijing Welcomes You* (2000), and Yin Xiuzhen's *Portable Cities* series (2002-2003), among many others, suggest a turn to experimental or counter-planning. Critical to many such projects is the process of redeploying the materials and aesthetic strategies of official planning discourse in order to make sense of the cultural and political logic of the model. Xing's *Urban Fiction* relies solely on existing

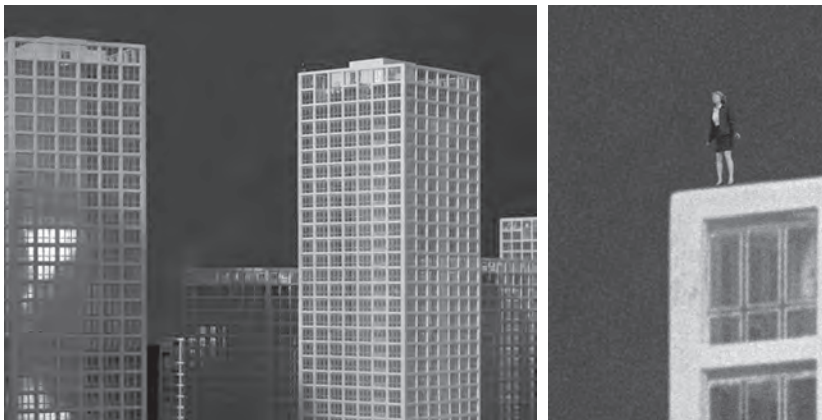
Fig. 3: *Beijing 2050* proposes to turn the concrete expanse of Tiananmen Square into a forest MAD Architecture, 2005 COURTESY MAD

models and digital manipulation – two key forms of projection – to investigate what it feels like to inhabit a blueprint. Her miniatures are haunted by human presence, an inversion that draws attention to the lifelessness of planning's visual culture.

Most famously, perhaps, Cao Fei has borrowed from planning's audiovisual register in order to reformulate current designs of and on the city (see Fig. 5). Her project, *RMB City: A Second Life City Planning*, is a “condensed incarnation of the contemporary Chinese city” that intermixes real and virtual urban elements and exists across a variety of platforms in first and Second Life. Its audiovisual form is a composite of post-socialist symbolism – panda bears, statues, mega structures, building cranes, trains and blue skies and oceans – that displays a mastery of planning's visual rhetoric. Of particular interest is the project's intense focus on its own development process. Before opening in Second Life, numerous videos, interviews and exhibitions explored the process of designing and constructing the city, including models, drawings, plans, animations and weekly construction site videos. Clips of construction draw on the iconography and sounds of actual building sites, demonstrating the importance of such runes to the experience of the global city.

In an interview about the project, Cao asserts: “I don't think that building my own city is an expression of individualism. I feel it is precisely an acknowledgement and belief in the practice of democracy. I think this project will lead to the foundation on which to experiment with utopian practices”. Cao's claim links up with a thick field of current media practices that take up and seep into projections as a way of claiming the city. That is, while such examples can be described as avant-garde and are perhaps not widely recognisable to ordinary Chinese citizens, the innovations they have introduced and the emergence of design as a multimodal social capacity are widespread and have everyday implications. While out of the scope of this brief essay, these capacities can be located in emerging forms of political society associated with China's New Documentary Movement, Internet cultures, and related forms of organisation and capacity that take place outside of the state and civil society (issues that I take up in my larger study).

Fig. 4: *Urban Fictions*, Xing Danwen, detail view, right, 2004 to present
COURTESY XING DANWEN



Finally, we can juxtapose Xing's *Urban Fictions* and Cao's *RMB City* to the broader textures of planning's visual culture. City plans and urban landscapes are decidedly void of human life – they abstract, make static, defer, and rely on the bird's eye view. What is so valuable about MAD, Xing and Cao's visualisations, among many others, is that they ask what it means to inhabit a projection, map or model. Just as Chinese visual culture in the 1990s and into the 2000s was concerned with the problems of living in a city of ruins, and of maintaining

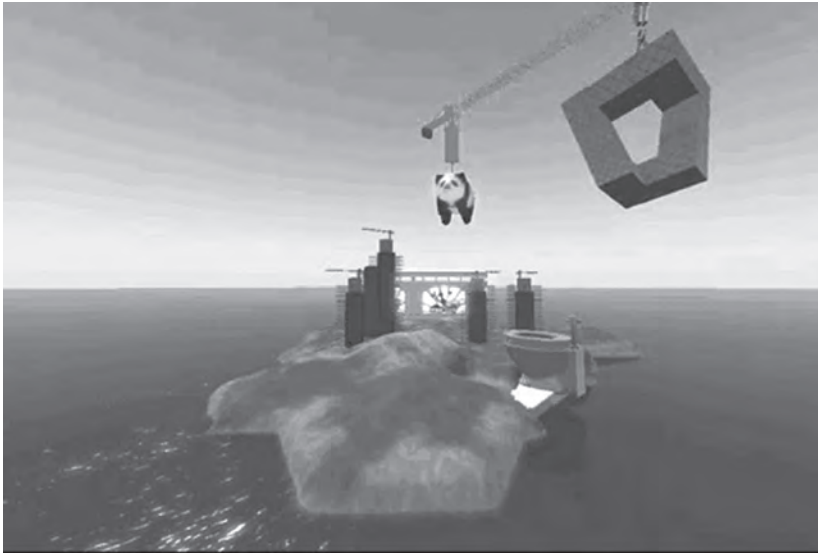


Fig. 5: The development of Cao Fei's *RMB City* engages the practices of contemporary urban design through videos on the construction site¹²

cognitive maps of spaces that disappear at the speed of a shutter, so too, recent cultural production turns to examine the politics of transitional spaces and of *projections*, including many newly erected buildings, neighbourhoods and infrastructures that have yet to be made into meaningful and liveable sites. ■

Notes

- 1 AbdouMaliq Simone. **For the City Yet Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities** (Duke University Press, 2004, Durham, N.C.), p. 7.
- 2 Boaventura de Sousa Santos. "Globalizations". In **Theory Culture Society** 23, pp. 394-395 (2006).
- 3 Anna Tsing. "The Global Situation". In **Cultural Anthropology** 15(3), p. 330 (Aug 2000).
- 4 de Sousa Santos, op. cit., p. 395.
- 5 Collaborative research undertaken with photographer Graham Bury in Beijing in 2007-08. See our project website for more images and information: www.projectionsproject.com.
- 6 Quoted in Lawrence Liang, "Porous Legalities and Avenues of Participation", in **Sarai Reader 05: Bare Acts** (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2005, Delhi), pp. 14-15. Available at: <http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/05-bare-acts> (last accessed 18 September 2012).
- 7 See "Beijing 2050" proposal on MAD's official website. Available at: http://www.i-mad.com/#works_details?wtid=4&id=35 (last accessed 7 November 2012).
- 8 See "Floating Island Over the Central Business District". Available at: <http://www.i-mad.com/index.asp?go=/#/projects/all/32/> (last accessed 10 April 2011).
- 9 Xing Danwen. "Urban Fiction", work statement. Available at: www.danwen.com/web/works/uf/statement.html (last accessed 20 December 2012).
- 10 See examples of such construction videos on Cao's YouTube page: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbq_x0QJk-g (last accessed 23 September 2012).
- 11 Interview with Cao Fei on the PBS series **Art 21**, "Fantasy", season 5 (2009). Watch interview online at: <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/cao-fei/> (last accessed 9 October 2012).
- 12 This screen capture is taken from the video "RMB City Construction, Week 1", on the RMBCityHall YouTube page. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbq_x0QJk-g (last accessed 23 September 2012).

HOW ABOUT WE MEET AND I TELL YOU ABOUT MUSIC NOTATION?

Mehreen Murtaza + Shehzad Noor Butt

"Does the actual scale (physical dimensions in relation to paper size, length of latticework, etc.) matter or affect the musical reading in any way?"

Short answer: No.

"What do musical notations for our music look like? Is there even a music sheet for eastern classical music?"

Short answer: Most of our music is orally taught. Our music is similar to jazz in that there is a lot of improvisation. You don't have kids mimicking performances of other musicians note for note. Also, no two performances will usually be similar. So there is no need for such notation.

My brother plays the sitar; I asked him for a more comprehensive answer, this is what he had to say:

"We don't have much use for notation, but here is Bhatkhande's notation (he was the musicologist who systematised music in terms of *thaats* and so on, whereas earlier there was a more abstract classification system in which there were six chief *ragas*, each of which had six *raginis* or something like that").

There exist two notation systems. One developed by Pt Paluskar, which is a little more elaborate and for the same reason intricate and difficult to use. And the other developed by Pt Bhatkhande, which is a little more easy to use, and is the system we will be following here throughout.

Shuddha Swar (Normal Notes): No symbol for *shuddha swar*.

Example: Sa, Re, Ga, Ma

Komal Swar (Flat Notes): Shown by a small line under the note.

Example: Re, Ga, Dha, Ni

Teevra Swar (Sharp Notes): Shown by a small vertical line above the note.

Mandra Saptak Swar (Lower Octave Note): Shown by a dot below.

Example: Ni Dha Pa Ma

Maddhya Saptak (Middle Octave Note): Has no sign.

Example: Pa, Ma

Taar Saptak Swar (Higher Octave Note): Shown by a dot above.

Example: Rē Gā Mā Gā

A dash or hyphen is used for lengthening a note. One dash corresponds to one beat when playing or singing with the *taal*.

Example: Sa - Ni - consists of four beats in all.

Avagraha: Shown by an 'S' to indicate elongated syllables within words.

Example: GoSSSvindaSSS

Chandra: Shown by a half-moon sign. Any number of notes can be placed inside the half-moon to indicate that they are to be rendered in a single beat.

Example: SaReGaMa

Kan Swar (Grace Note): Written above the note in superscript at top left.

Example: Sa^{Re}Ga

Meend: Indicates sound continuing from one note to the next.

Example: Ma Nī

Notes in brackets: Equal to a short phrase of three or four notes. Sung very fast so that the notes blend and sound as one note. The order for these notes is: one note after the note in brackets, the note after, the note in brackets and so on.

Example: (Sa)- ReSaNiSa

This is not standard notation, however. For example, the one I use and have seen being used elsewhere as well has *shudh* notes (corresponding to the major scale) written in upper case (for instance: **SRGMPDN**), and the *non-shudh* in lower case (as with: **SrgmPdn**). A hyphen above will indicate a higher octave and one below will indicate a lower.

It's often not useful to write things out on a chart that indicates the beat cycle, however. The structure of a musical phrase can be made clearer just by writing it in terms of its components: **PMGRS MGRS GRS RS**, for example.

By the way, **srgmpdn** stands for **sa re ga ma pa dha ni**, which is equivalent to **do re mi fa so la ti do**.

"My point being – if we're going to do something that has been worked to death already, who's to say we can't have our version that still retains some semblance of originality, right?"

I agree, that's how I feel about song writing. It's the problem with having an idiolect.

"We create our own music symbology based on the sounds we're already using in the play. You mentioned the tanpura, with its three strings and the use of "HU".

What if we convert these sounds to our form of symbols? That way, I have a legitimate musical system to play with."

I don't get it.

"One more obnoxious question. What is the difference between a tone and an octave again?"

I love talking about music, please ask me as many as you like. Tone has to do with the quality of a sound with respect to timbre.

As for an octave, you know that musical sound can be divided into 12 notes.

C C# D D# E F F# G G# A A# B C

So let's assume the first C has a frequency of 440 Hz, the second C will have a frequency of 2×440 Hz, exactly double the frequency. It'll be higher in pitch but will be represented by the same lettering. The distance between the two Cs is called an octave. What's important to understand is that after the second C, the pattern starts to repeat itself, i.e.:

A A# B C- C# D D# E

Could I just give you a small lecture on the basics of western music? Or eastern music for that matter? I think it'll help explain serialism better.

1) The Azaan

In the intro to *Fundamentals of Love*,¹ you will hear *azaans*. I sang those *azaans* (waits for applause). I want to compose a contrapuntal *azaan* that'll be inspired by Arnold Schoenberg's serialism. Needless to say, it'll be rendered using voices.

In music, serialism is a method or technique of composition that uses a series of values to manipulate different musical elements (Griffiths 2001:116). Serialism began primarily with Schoenberg's 12-tone technique, though his contemporaries were also working to establish serialism as an example of post-tonal thinking (Whittall 2008:1). The 12-tone technique orders the 12 notes of the chromatic scale, forming a row or series, and providing a unifying basis for a composition's melody, harmony, structural progressions and variations. Other types of serialism also work with sets, collections of objects, but not necessarily with fixed-order series, and extend the technique to other musical dimensions (often called 'parameters'), such as duration, dynamics and timbre. The idea of serialism is also applied in various ways in the visual arts, design and architecture (Bandur 2001:5, 12, 74; Gerstner 1964:passim). The musical use of the word 'series' should not be confused with the term 'series' in mathematics.

I want to perform all the vocal parts and alter the pitches so that they sound like different people. By altering the voices, I also want to hide the gender of the muezzin and the choir. I plan on doing some reading on music and Islam, particularly about why stringed instruments are not permitted. If you have any literature available please share. Also, I plan on studying the *surah* that is used in the *azaan* as well as the scale that is used. I want to know what their method of teaching is.

I don't know if it fits the play, but it is an idea.

2) Notation Experiment

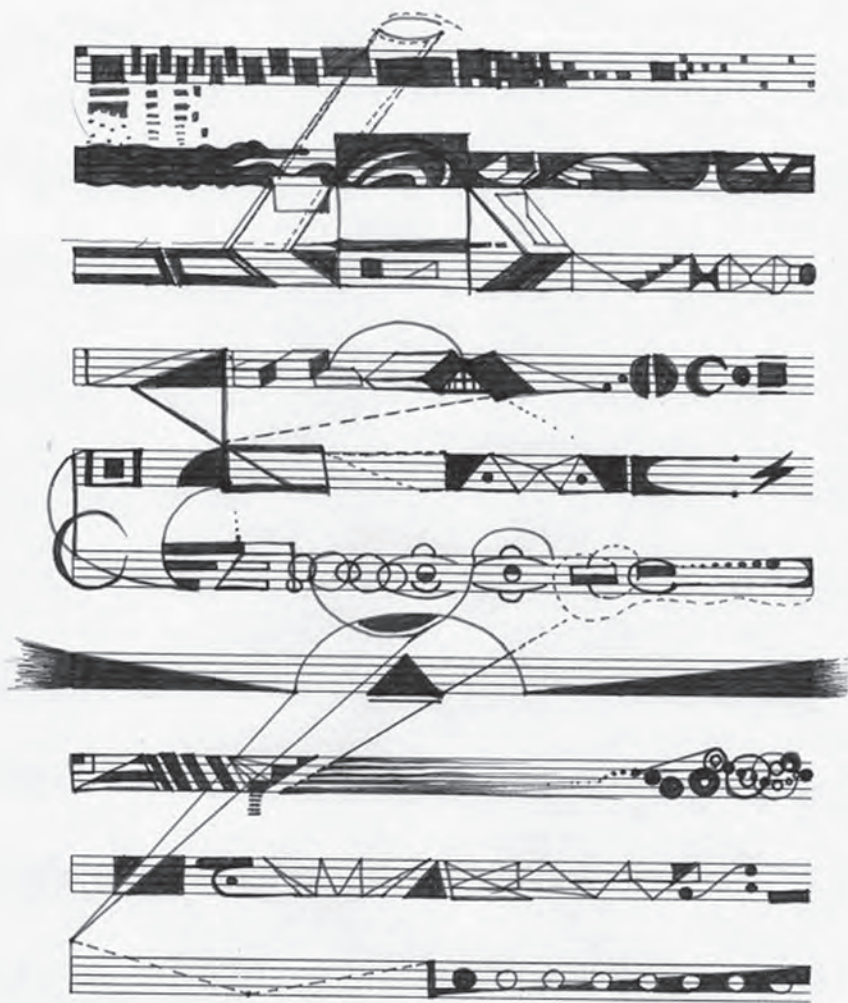
This is separate from the *azaan*. I am sending you a link where you can print out sheet music for free.

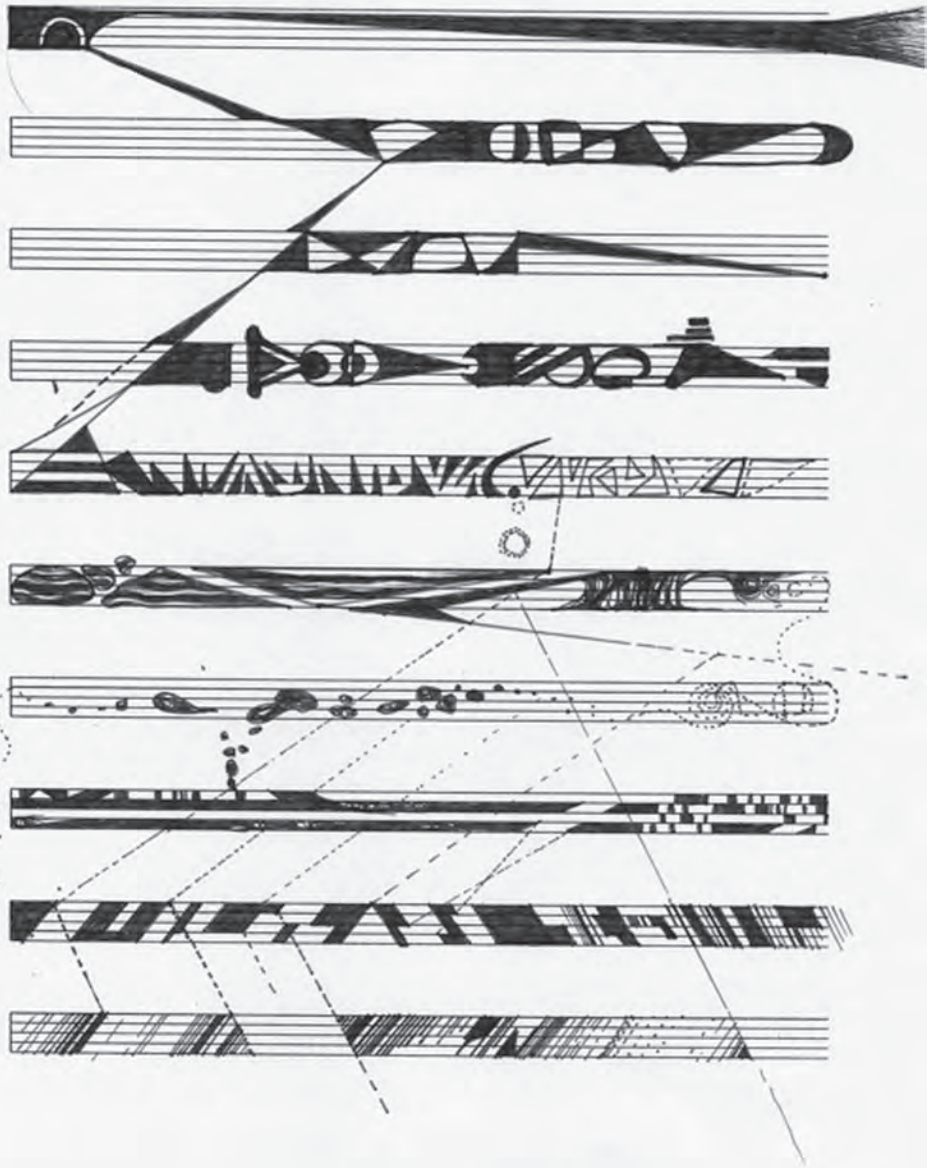
<http://www.blanksheetmusic.net/>

Just click on the option that says 'Piano'. It's the one with two symbols that are stacked on top of each other. The top symbol represents higher pitches, the bottom one lower pitches. Don't worry too much about it, just draw on them.

When we last met, you spoke about people asking questions during the exhibition. I figured this would make matters simpler. I'll be interpreting the symbols you draw.







I've been trying to catch up on some short readings, and I recently learnt of a new branch of philosophy that the French already labelled before the rest of the world. I think it sums up EXACTLY what I'm interested in. It's an awkward feeling to know someone's sorted out my loopy, confused thoughts into so succinct a word as 'pataphysics'. Makes me content because it is self-affirming, but also bothered because I know somebody else got to it before I did – hah!

The final interpretation, and one that is dear to us gathered here today, is the 'imaginary technology of the pataphysical', that is to say: an imaginary solution which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments (Jarry). These technologies are 'inutlilious' yet are standardized by virtue of their conformity to the laws governing exceptions. They tend to remain imaginary, although apparently real artifacts are sometimes created to provide evidence of their existence.²

My understanding of it is quite loose, and I think it's going to be my buzzword for a while now. I'd describe it as a notion of something beyond, something experimental – the science of imaginary solutions. A lot of science fiction and futurology is using it as a means of describing the imaginary potential of existing machines or vice versa; imaginary solutions to the potential of machines/technology. Hence the imaginary technology of the metaphysical. This concept is quite close to the idea of The Singularity where all AI will eventually be self-sufficient and take over the world yaddayadda.

I hope this stuff isn't boring you because I'm really excited to have realised what I've been trying to tackle for such a while. Also, I think I'm more fluent with words more than anything else these days, and talking (read writing) things over clears out the clutter in my head.

Did you get a chance to see my series 'Tastes like Futurism'? It dealt with very similar themes in terms of our consumption of food. That's a project that is still bubbling under the surface. I want to work on more 'dishes' and finish the series as a published menu book.

One of the dishes called FuvaFuva is described as:

A DELICIOUS DESSERT TO CURB THE CURIOUS SYNDROME OF BASHFULNESS.
SEATED ON TOP OF THE RASPBERRY LIQUID LAVA JELLY, A SPECIAL AQUA
FLAVOURED JELLY CONTAINS A MIX OF TWO PART OCEANIC AIR ESSENCE AND
ONE PART COCONUT EXTRACT – ALL FORTIFIED WITH TWO TABLESPOONS OF
ELECTROLYTES.

UPON INGESTION, THE ELECTROLYTES BOOT AN EXPERIMENTAL
RECORDING OF THE VERY LOW NOISE PRODUCED BY COLLISION OF EACH
EYELASH ON THE OTHER; ACUTELY SIMILAR TO F. SCHUBERT'S IMPROMPTUS.

AS A RESULT, THE CONSUMER'S EYELASHES SUDDENLY GROW 1-3
METRES IN A DAY.

(Sort of inspired by the ability to record microtones in your average studio now.)

"Professor V. and his team, The Tiny Oligarchy of Hi-Tech Imams, who have succeeded in extracting all the memories accumulated during the life of a patient, from his/her ocular spheres".

3) Silences made of 'Hu'

It would be cool if you use noise-cancelling headphones for the helmet. I could, in a soundproof room, record millions of *Hu*'s spoken in different combinations, and lower the volume such that it would seem like just the sound of a quiet room. In other words, what if I were in a soundproof booth, and I constructed a room based solely on *Hu*'s? It would be like crickets chirping. You know how they keep chirping until you can't tell if they've stopped or if your ears have gotten used to them.

Another use of *Hu* can be to... umm... compose the sound of the machinery? I sort of imagine technology powered only by spiritual energy. I figured that if the world had turned out that way, there would have been less noise. Low frequency stuff (enter Thomas Koner). This has the added advantage of making sure the radio play isn't too uncomfortable to listen to.

I was doing some quick reading in getting good quality recordings for mixing and thought this little bit of description aptly described the phenomenon of perceptible/imperceptible audio and its psychokinetic affect on the human ear.

http://www.tweakheadz.com/16_vs_24_bit_audio.htm

Lets talk about **sample rate** and the Nyquist Theory. The theory is that the actual upper threshold of a piece of digital audio will top out at half the sample rate. So if you're recording at 44.1, the highest frequencies generated will be around 22 kHz. That's 2 kHz higher than the typical human with excellent hearing can hear. Now we get into the real voodoo. Audiophiles have claimed since the beginning of digital audio that vinyl records on an analogue system sound better than digital audio. Indeed, you can find evidence that analogue recording and playback equipment can be measured up to 50 kHz, over twice our threshold of hearing. Here's the great mystery: the theory is that audio energy, even though we don't hear it, **exists and has an effect on the lower frequencies we do hear**. Back to the Nyquist Theory, a 96 kHz sample rate will translate into potential audio output at 48 kHz, not too far from the finest analogue sound reproduction. This leads one to surmise that the same principle is at work. The audio is improved in a threshold we cannot perceive and it makes what we hear "better". Like I said, it's voodoo.

Audio may not be perceptible at a certain frequency, but could still be responsible for creating effects that may not be logically plausible.

I kept referring to the dog whistle. Dogs can hear at a wider range of frequencies – up to 45 kHz – while we can hear only as high as 23 kHz. Cats 64 kHz, bats 110 kHz and porpoises up to 150 kHz.

There must be an in-between frequency that penetrates our ears and results in some sensation without being audible? Is that even possible?

An excerpt that reminded me of Harry Partch:

We have divided the octave into 12 equidistant degrees because we had to manage somehow and have constructed our instruments in such a way that we can never get in above or below or between them. Keyboard instruments, in particular, have so thoroughly schooled our ears that we are incapable of hearing anything else, incapable of hearing except through this impure medium.³

3) Tanpuras

I would like to use the *tanpura* conceptually, if not the actual sound of the *tanpura*. The purpose of the *tanpura* in classical music is very interesting. It usually plays three strings tuned to low **Sa**, **Pa** and high **Sa**. The instrument defines the range of the scale, i.e., the octave. All our music will happen within that range. I've used one when I went for classical training, the range reverberates in your entire being.

Do you remember the PTV [Pakistan Television] telecast with the *sarang*?

I learnt a new term today. Aleatory (controlled chance) "the change from one state to another, with or without returning motion, as opposed to a fixed state" (Decroupet and Ungeheuer 1998:98-99). I like this. I like this a lot.

4) Ocular Spheres

Eyes blinking remind me of the fluttering of wings – in slow motion. Or even rapid...
junovutimeanz?

What would the Big Bang have sounded like? An orgasm in space and time.

*“Universes were born when she opened her eyes,
only to be erased when she closed them”.*

“Abdus: As it expanded and thereby cooled, quarks bound themselves through the well-known physical forces into nucleons, these with electrons into atoms, and the atoms into galaxies and stars”.

5) What is the sound of light?

A million violins playing a high C? ■

Notes

- 1 Song recorded and performed by the band **Poor Rich Boy (and the toothless winos)**.
- 2 Given as keynote paper at the conference ‘Technologies Imaginaires: L’approche pataphysique de la musique’ at Université de Paris-IV, Sorbonne MINT-OMF, 30 March 2005, organised by Andrew HUGILL MTIRC (De Montfort University), Marc BATTIER, MINT-OMF (Paris-Sorbonne) and Philippe CATHE, CRLM (Paris-Sorbonne).
- 3 Bojan Buji. **Music in European Thought 1851-1912** (Cambridge University Press, 1988, London), p. 391.



APOCALYPSE

Akash Gaur

TO ALL WHO ARE READING ABOUT MY PROJECT, "APOCALYPSE".

THE NEWS WAS ALL OVER THE 24X7 TV NEWS CHANNELS THAT 21 MAY 2011 MIGHT BE THE END OF THIS WORLD. THAT CREATED HAVOC IN MY MIND. WHAT A THEATRICAL WAY THEY DESCRIBED IT, FRIGHTENING US ALL THE MORE. BUT TO ME, IT WAS RATHER FUNNY TOO. SO I WAS WAITING TO SEE WHETHER OR NOT SOMETHING WOULD HAPPEN, AND IF NOT, THEN HOW THE MEDIA WOULD REACT. THE DAY PASSED, AND THE MEDIA NEVER TALKED ABOUT IT AGAIN. THAT STRUCK ME, AND I THOUGHT OF DOING THIS SERIES ON THE WISHES OR PLANS OF PEOPLE FOR DOOMSDAY.

THERE WAS ALREADY NEWS OF THE MAYAN CALENDAR, THAT 21 DECEMBER 2012 WOULD BE THE END OF THE WORLD. A HOLLYWOOD MOVIE EVEN CAME OUT ABOUT IT. WHICH ACTUALLY GIVES YOU GOOSE BUMPS TO THINK ABOUT THE TIME AND THE END...

LIKE ME, I THINK EVERYBODY THINKS ABOUT A LONG LIFE AND AN IDEAL DEATH. BUT NO ONE EXPECTS THIS KIND OF SCARY DEATH, WHICH TERRIFIES EVERYONE. WHICH IS A KIND OF GIFT OF TODAY'S MEDIA: ADVERTISING SCARY DEATH...

SO, HERE I THOUGHT OF TAKING A STEP FORWARD TO MEET THIS ADVERTISING, WHERE I WOULD ASK PEOPLE TO GIVE ME THEIR THOUGHTS ON SAVING THEMSELVES FROM DOOMSDAY, THE APOCALYPSE...

I STARTED THIS VERY CASUALLY WITH MY FRIENDS BY ASKING WHAT THEY WOULD DO IF THIS WERE GOING TO HAPPEN. THEN I FELT THIS SHOULD BE TAKEN A STEP FURTHER TO REACH OUT TO MORE PEOPLE AND KNOW HOW THEY TAKE THIS IMAGINED REALITY TO HAVE HAPPENED...

MY IDEA IS NOT TO SCARE ANYONE, BUT TO HAVE A KNOWLEDGE OF YOU AND HOW YOU CONSIDER THIS DAY TO BE...



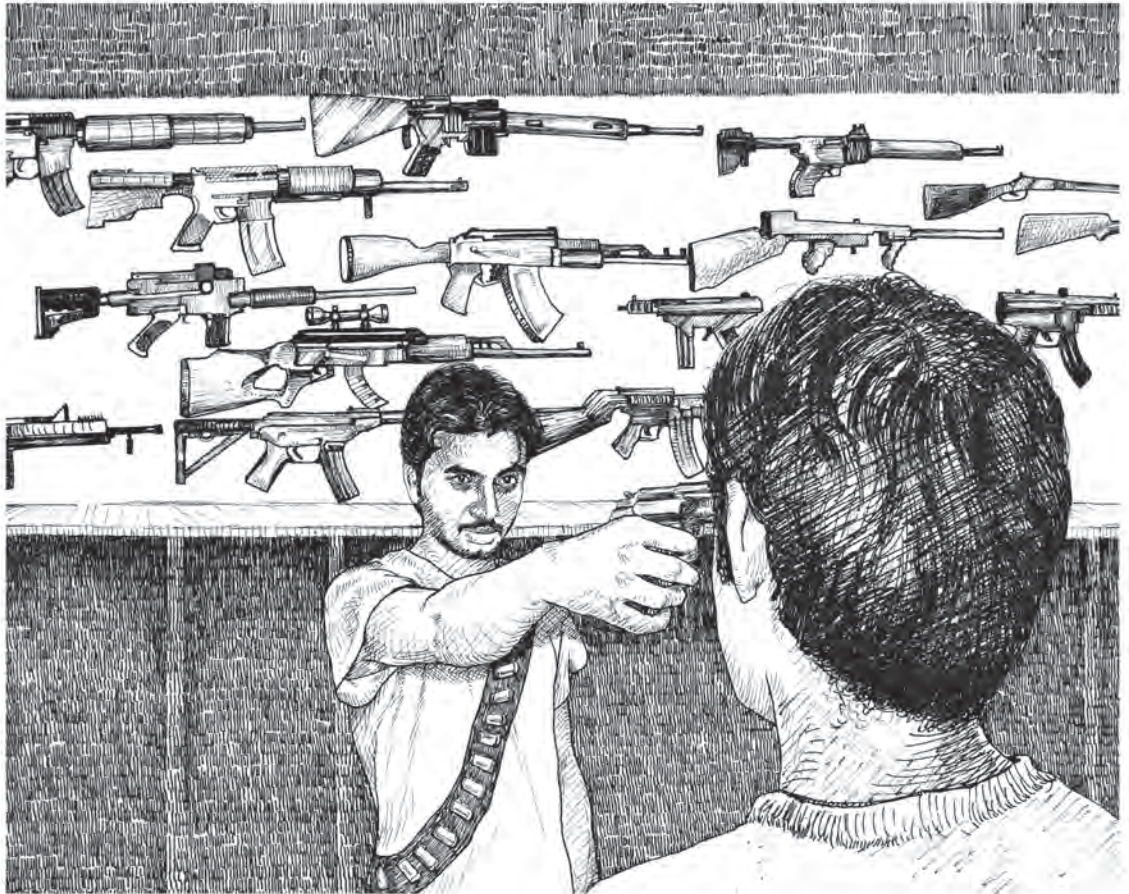


IF I KNOW THAT THE WORLD IS GONNA END... I WOULD DIG
A HOLE 1000 FEET DEEP AND TAKE THE THINGS I LOVE
THE MOST... A TV, AND 7000 BOTTLES OF ALCOHOL.
SHIVEN SINGH TANWAR



HAVING WORKED MY ENTIRE CHILDHOOD IN A ROADSIDE EATING JOINT, I'VE WATCHED PEOPLE GORGING ON FOOD. IF GOD WERE TO FULFILL EACH ONE'S DREAMS ON THE LAST DAY, I'D LIKE TO HAVE A MOTORCYCLE LIKE YOU, AKASH, AND DINE AT THE TAJ HOTEL IN MUMBAI. **VIJAY KUMAR**

A DAY BEFORE THE APOCALYPSE, I'D PROVIDE EVERYONE I KNOW THE CHOICE OF HOW THEY'D LOVE TO DIE. HOW? WELL, BY LETTING THEM CHOOSE THE WEAPON THEY'D LIKE TO DIE BY, FROM THE COLLECTION OF RIFLES I POSSESS. IT DOES SOUND A BIT WEIRD... BUT NOTHING LIKE GIVING PEOPLE A CHOICE WHEN THEY KNOW IT'S ALL GOING TO END THE NEXT DAY. **AJAY KUMAR**

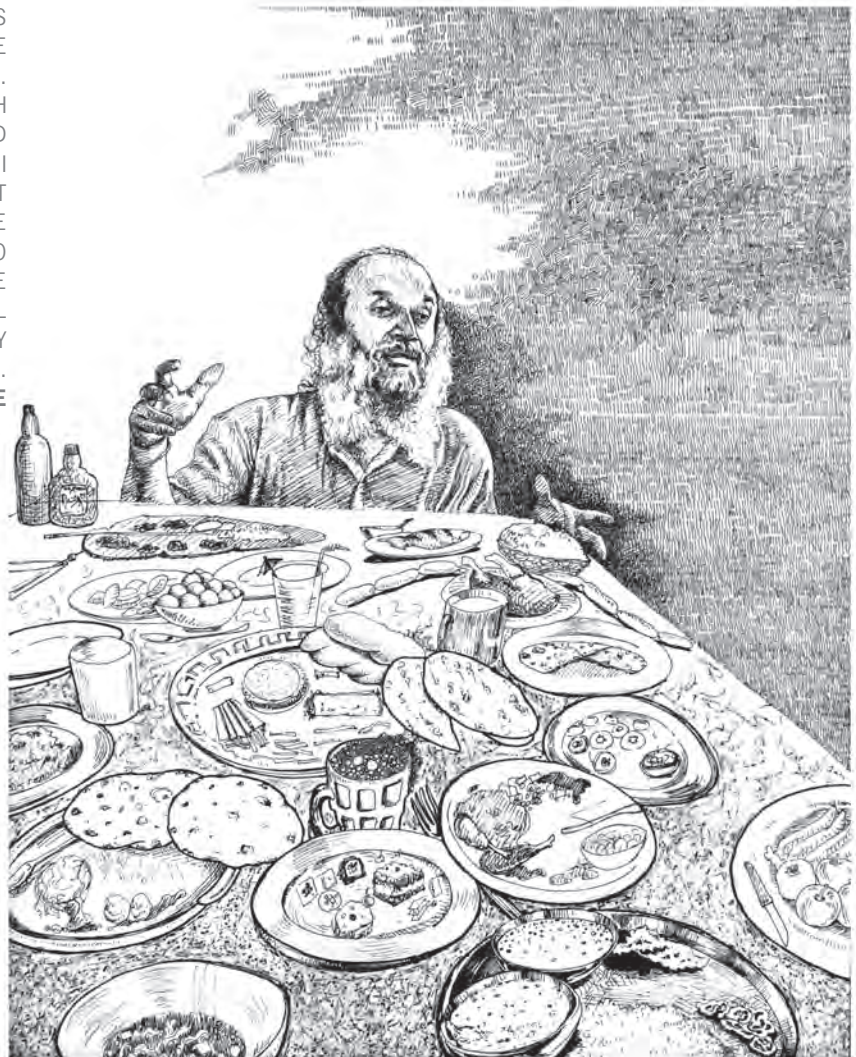


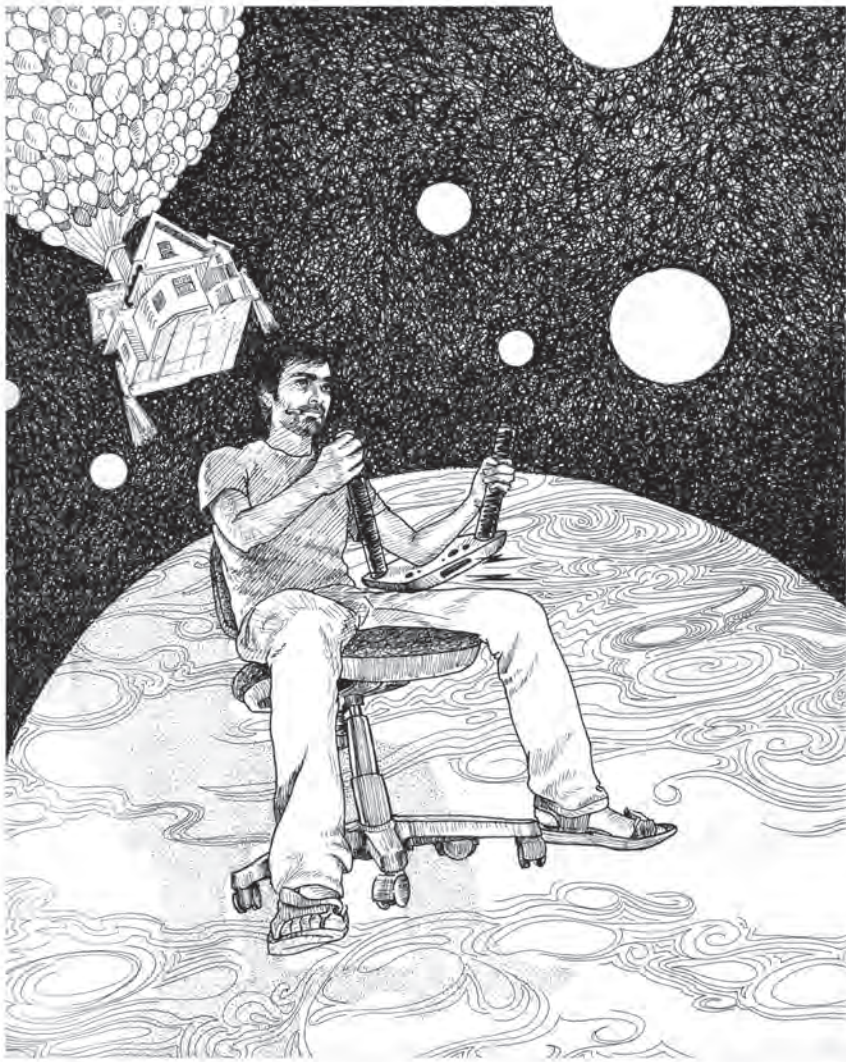
I WILL FOR SURE FIND A WAY ROUND THE CALAMITY. DOREMON ALWAYS GIVES NOBITA A GADGET WHEN HE IS IN TOUBLE. WHEN I TELL HIM ABOUT THIS PROBLEM, HE WILL SURELY PROVIDE ME WITH SUCH A GADGET, AND I WILL USE IT TO SAVE MYSELF AND MAYBE EVEN THE WORLD. **ANA SHARMA**



I'M A FOODIE WHO'S BEEN DENIED THE PLEASURE OF EATING. THERE'S SO MUCH I WOULD HAVE HAD ON MY MENU IF I WEREN'T A HEART PATIENT. IF THE WORLD WERE TO COME TO AN END THE NEXT DAY, I'D EAT ALL I WANT, WITHOUT ANY FEAR OF DOCTORS.

AMIT MUKHARJEE





I'M A CREATIVE PERSON. IF LIFE ON EARTH WERE TO END THE NEXT DAY, I'D HOPE TO LIVE ON. I'D ATTACH MYSELF AND ALL MY BELONGINGS TO HUGE HELIUM BALLOONS LIKE IN THE ANIMATION MOVIE 'UP' AND LEAVE FOR ONE OF JUPITER'S MOONS WHERE SCIENTISTS CLAIM THAT LIFE IS POSSIBLE.

PRADEEP YADAV

IF DEATH WAS
INEVITABLE, AND IF
EVERYONE INCLUDING
MY FAMILY MEMBERS
AND CLOSE ONES WERE
TO DIE, I'D CHOOSE
'TOGETHERNESS' IN
DEATH. I'D GET MY
ENTIRE FAMILY, MY
FRIENDS AND MY DOG
TOGETHER FOR A LAST
MEAL AND POISON US
ALL. IT WOULD BE LIKE
CHRIST'S LAST SUPPER.

ANKITA DHAR





I'M A SCULPTOR, A NARCISSISTIC. I'VE ALWAYS WANTED MY OWN PORTRAIT, A ROCK-CUT, LARGER-THAN-LIFE SCULPTURE. IF THE WORLD IS WASHED AWAY, AND EXCAVATIONS ARE MADE LATER, MY STATUE WOULD BE DISCOVERED. AND JUST AS ARCHAEOLOGISTS CONSIDER LARGE SCULPTURES FROM ANCIENT CIVILISATIONS TO BE OF EMPERORS OR GODS, MY IMAGE TOO WILL GO DOWN IN HISTORY FOREVER. **MOHIT MADHUR**

MIS-PROJECTIONS:

SELF IN THE AGE OF TECHNOSCIENTIFIC CULTURE

Shiju Sam Varughese

*I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
Whatever I see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.
I am not cruel, only truthful,
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.*

“Mirror”, Sylvia Plath, 1961

*My mirror has gone mad.
It throws weird images at me
In the past
It was sensible.
Once an angel
Once a witch
But always
One image at a time.
....
Before I collapse
I throw my mad mirror
Out through the window
Down to the streets.
I killed it.*

“My Mirror has Gone Mad”, Nandita K.S., 1993

Self and the Mirror Image

René Magritte (1898–1967), one of the greatest surrealist painters of the 20th century, once did a commissioned portrait of his poet-friend Edward James. The painting, *La Reproduction Interdite (Not to be Reproduced, 1937)*, depicts James facing a mirror, but the image both he and we see reflected is his back, instead of, as one would expect, his face. This *mis-projection* is the theme of this essay; the relationship between the self and its mirrored image, and the fear of losing correspondence between the two.

This fear of mis-projection can be traced back to the mirror stage propounded by Jacques Lacan. The infant between his/her sixth and 16th months of growth develops a unique relationship with his/her image in the mirror by identifying it as him/herself. This self-identification helps the infant to realise him/herself as a coherent entity, separated from his/her surroundings and from other human beings (Lacan 2001). This very moment of self-constitution that establishes “a relation between the organism and its reality” (*ibid.*:4) with the aid of its reflection has a long-standing impact on the individual’s later development. The significant point here is that the subject becomes aware of itself through an exterior *projection* of its body on a reflective surface. This *imago* that constitutes the subject is a relationship between the exteriority of the body and its projection on the mirror, which is a technological device that provides a reflective surface.

This relationality the infant establishes in the mirror stage is relentlessly corroborated in his/her everyday life by spending time in front of the mirror. This little performance helps the subject reassert the correspondence between the self and its mirror image, but in a different fashion – unlike in the mirror stage, the subject engages with it in a reverse mode. In this extended mirror stage, the subject examines its reflection under the assumption that the individual self has an independent and primordial existence irrespective of the image, which is simply the projection of the subject's physicality on a reflective surface. In the extended mirror stage, the material artefact called the mirror becomes invisible between the subject and its image (we look at the reflection and not the mirror itself), assumingly establishing a linear relationship between them. Here, the supposition of the subject is that its image is merely a reflection on the inert surface of the mirror, but this conceals the constitution of the self by the image in the mirror stage.

Magritte's painting breaks this seamless and secure connection the subject assumes between self and image by bringing the materiality of the mirror back into the foreground. The mirror in *Not to be Reproduced* stops being an inert reflective surface between the subject and his image, and becomes visible through the act of mis-projection.¹ The mirror in the painting continues to reflect but severs the presumed correspondence between self and image by claiming agency. This is crucial in the context of the painting as it was a commissioned portrait of a 'real' man. In this sense, the painting disturbs the whole set of meanings and viewing practices associated with a portrait: it declines to represent the subject of the portrait like a mirror by presenting the mirror itself as not corresponding to the real individual being painted, producing a disturbing effect on the spectator.

Mirrors of Modernity

The mirror is one of the finest artefacts modernity has invented. Mirrors have been available since antiquity, but

their functions and characteristics were different from modern mirrors. The ancient mirrors were made of metal plates, often very small. Bigger ones were developed later to adorn the walls of royal palaces, indicating social status and power. It was during the Renaissance that mercury-coated mirrors started being manufactured,² and the technique was perfected by the 16th century. Although metal-coated glass mirrors had been available since the first century CE, it was only in the late mediaeval period that accuracy in reflecting an object was attained. By the 17th century, mirrors became commonplace in Europe, albeit expensive owing to their complex manufacturing process.³

It was around the early modern period that the mirror started losing its magical capabilities and ritualistic functions. It became 'secular' and 'rational', a process accentuated by the emergence of optics as a scientific discipline in the 17th century, followed by the massive growth of the mirror-manufacturing industry in Europe (Pendergrast 2007:3). By the 19th century, a new chemical process was invented to manufacture the cheaper, metallic silver-coated mirror, thus making it an everyday household artefact. From its pre-modern existence as an object of divination, the mirror evolved to be a mundane reflective surface that projects images with greater clarity and finitude (*ibid.*) at which the modern individual stares to see him/herself. This process of self-examination is rational and scientific due to the ability of the mirror to reflect reality as *it is*, without distortion. This assurance offered by every modern mirror makes it disappear, while the image projected by it is understood as corresponding to the pre-constituted self. It is this *portrait quality of the mirror* and/or the *mirror-like nature of the portrait* that is disrupted in Magritte's portraiture of Edward James.⁴

The Fear of Mis-projection

The 'truthfulness' and innocence of the mirror invoked by Sylvia Plath (see the opening quote) suppress the fear of

its emergence as an irrational projecting surface of altered materiality,⁵ capable of cutting the strings between self and image. This Lacanian moment of the Real that disrupts the symbolic can completely disorient the subject, and the fear of losing control of one's own image in the mirror is increasingly a recurring theme in contemporary art, literature and cinema. The truthfulness of existence – achieved through the exactitude of spatial coordination between the real place the subject belongs to and its reflection in the mirror – when disrupted shatters the subject in unexpected ways, setting off a horrific experience, as referred to in Nandita K.S.'s poem quoted at the start.⁶

Cinema has the potential to be an unruly mirror which can overpower the spectator more than a canvas. The spectator's status as being engulfed by the screen on which larger-than-life-size images are projected contributes to its ability to create more horror in comparison to a painting: if *Not to be Reproduced* was projected on a cinema screen as a moving/jerking frame, its effect would have been even more horrific. The fear of the loss of the presupposed correspondence between self (of the spectator/protagonist) and image is a central trope in contemporary horror films. In *Below* (David Twohy, 2002), the Hollywood horror film set in the backdrop of the Second World War, a US submarine called *Tiger Shark* becomes haunted, leading to the killing of the cabin crew in its claustrophobic interiority. In a formidable sequence, a crew member enters an empty cubicle in the submarine, where he realises that his image in the old mirror is a little slower in corresponding to his body movement. Later on, when he turns his face away from the mirror to the camera, his image also turns away but unexpectedly attains autonomy and turns back, staring at him. The disturbed lieutenant suddenly looks back but gets terrified by his image that has transformed into a dead man's pale face. This autonomy claimed by the image in the mirror is more recurrent a theme in *Mirrors* (Alexandre Aja, 2008), a horror film in which mirrors in a dilapidated building

are possessed by evil spirits. There are numerous scenes in the film that present horrific moments of agency claimed by mirrors, manifested in the subjugation and killing of the subject by its own image. For instance, the scene in which the protagonist's sister, Angela, gets murdered: she looks at the mirror and gets ready for a bath, but when she moves away, her image in the mirror remains, closely watching her getting into the tub. Then the image rips off its jaws, and the real Angela dies of excessive bleeding caused by the violent act performed by her image.

To create horror, both films manipulate this basic instability in the self-and-image relationship that might lead to catastrophe and self-annihilation. When the projecting screen goes out of control, and the projected image behaves in unexpected ways, it disorients the protagonist as well as the spectator. The image that goes awry disrupts their combined gaze.⁷ This is the fear of mis-projection – the fear, which always exists in tandem with the unending fascination for the projected image, that the self would be subjugated by the image which hesitates to be mere reflection.

The fear of mis-projection depicted in these films turns our attention to the projecting surfaces in everyday life. In *Mirrors*, the camera pauses many times on reflective surfaces like mirrors, windowpanes and water, indicating the potential of all these surfaces to attain a new materiality, which becomes unbearable and horrific to the spectator. In this sense, the agency claimed by the projecting surfaces (including the cinema screen) suddenly disrupts the illusionary seamlessness the subject assumingly achieves with its reflection. The screen/mirror ceases to be a reflector, but becomes instead a material presence independent of the onlooker, and takes control over the situation by distorting and manipulating the image against the subject's will. It is this sudden obscurity which manifests between the subject and its reflection due to the changed materiality of the mirror/screen that becomes spectral and invokes horror.

Technoscientific Mis-projections

Everyday life is suffused with reflective surfaces of different kinds, thanks to the technoscientific culture we live in. From mirrors to clocks to radars to Hubble's space telescope,⁸ from mobile phones to television, cinema and computer screens, we engage with a wide variety of projecting surfaces in our quotidian life. In this sense, the entire technoscientific *built environment* we inhabit functions as a wide projecting-screen that reflects our collective self. Like the mirror that achieved its materiality in the crucible of scientific and technological advancements and the industrial revolution, in tandem with the emergence of the modern self, these screens too shape our-selves. Our collective selves in contemporary culture are resultant of the assumed coherence accomplished through the mediation of these technoscientific gadgets and artefacts we use.

As in the case of seeing our reflection in the mirror, these everyday screens too concurrently evoke rapture and rupture – it is a narcissistic experience impregnated with the fear of self-immolation. Therefore, the changed materiality of these contemporary technoscientific projecting surfaces can be more threatening and suicidal than the horror invoked by unruly mirrors. This is the theme of *Ringu* (1998), a popular Japanese horror movie directed by Hideo Nakata,⁹ in which the television screen becomes possessed. The evil spirit of Sadako, a teenage girl who was thrown into a well by her parents and thus killed, begins to take revenge through a video cassette circulated among cable TV-watching teenagers. Whoever watches the bizarre video receives a phone call and is killed seven days later by Sadako when she gets out of the television screen and walks towards the frightened victim.

Unlike with *Mirror*, in *Ringu* it is not the image of oneself that goes berserk. Instead, it is the act of viewing that initiates one's destruction. The voyeuristic pleasure of the spectator is lost in the dreadful experience of the TV screen behaving in unanticipated ways, ceasing to be a truthful

projecting surface but becoming instead a medium through which the image of Sadako crosses the divide between the imaginary and the real. In this sense, the image stops being an image and claims a physical presence in the very living space of the spectator, against his/her expectation of the television screen as an inert projecting surface that mirrors the real to provide voyeuristic pleasure. This is a reversal of the function of screen/mirror as capturing the image of the embodied objects/individuals. The image attains embodiment by crossing over from the imaginary to the real.¹⁰ The coordination between the real and the imaginary is lost and the boundaries are collapsed, leading to the death of the spectator.¹¹

This unexpected change of the materiality of the screen is the central trope in the successful Hollywood film series *Final Destination* (2000–2011), where death reclaims in bizarre ways the lives of those who have escaped it. This escape is resulted by the premonitions of one of the victims before the actual mishap. The same theme repeats in all the five films in the series, but each time in more shocking and sophisticated ways. While in *Below*, the technoscientific built environment of the submarine has become dangerous for its crew due to an attack from a German war ship, in *Final Destination*, the very technoscientific habitat attains agency and autonomy, methodically killing its targets in unexpected ways. Death follows its fugitives, who are comfortably engrossed in ordinary, everyday situations. For example, in the fifth film of the series (2011), the murder of Candice, a gymnast, is triggered by a screw that lands on the gymnastic bar from the ceiling, hurting another performer who falls down, kicking a packet of powder into the air. The powder blinds Candice who is practicing on the bar and loses control over her body. She is whirled up into the air and hits the floor upside down, which breaks her spine and kills her at once. Such a chain of events is frequently unleashed in the series by technoscientific spaces such as an aeroplane, a cinema hall, a sports stadium, a gymnasium, a spa, restaurants,

posh houses and swimming pools, highways and bridges, elevators and escalators, an automated car washing unit, an amusement park, a shopping mall, an ophthalmology clinic: almost every single space we inhabit today.

The film series, as we have seen, generates horror by depicting these technoscientific spaces as claiming agency. In everyday life, these spaces are meant to be at our disposal. We make sense of our existence by skilfully manoeuvring these spaces with the help of gadgets and devices. Our embodiment in contemporary technoscientific culture is mediated through these paraphernalia, making us comfortably engrossed in these habitats. However, the potential of these spaces to claim independence and overpower us is always a horrific possibility, which films like *Final Destination* invoke.¹²

Conclusion

In this essay, an attempt has been made to explore how the self is projected by the technoscientific material culture we are engrossed in. The reflection of the body on the mirror helps the infant understand itself as a coherent self. This could be a major reason behind the modern individual being charmed by the reflections/projections of a wide variety. However, this fascination always exists in tandem with the fear of mis-projection. When the projecting screen goes out of control, and the projected images of the self behave in unexpected ways, it creates horror.

While this theme is explored in literature and art, cinematic imagination portrays this fear of mis-projection in more nuanced ways, as we have discussed. The fear of mis-projection gets more and more intensified and complicated with the advance of technology. The technoscientific spaces we construct are interactive and capable of extending our bodies with the aid of their sophisticated gadgets and devices, transforming us into cyborgs (Haraway 2005). The pleasure of cyborgic existence, however, simultaneously invokes the fear of mis-projection.

The discussion on mis-projection raises further questions on how spectators of Indian cinema encounter the problem of mis-projection. Do we also share the same worries and anxieties in the everyday construction of our-selves with the post-industrial societies of the West? What are the functions of projecting surfaces in India? Do we really expect precision and truthfulness in our interaction with screens/mirrors? How are the tensions around mis-projection getting articulated in Indian popular cinema, art and literature? These questions are further complicated by the complex circulation and entanglement of ideas and texts across the global, national and local-specific cultural registers. ■

I am grateful to Navaneetha Mokkil for her comments on an earlier draft of the paper. Thanks are also due to Deepali Khaire for the enthusiasm shared on the question of self and subjectivity.

Notes

- 1 This is a recurring theme in many of his paintings. For example, see **The False Mirror** (1928), **The Treachery of Images** (1928-29), **Eternal Evidence** (1930), **Representation** (1937), **Dangerous Liaisons** (1963), **The Looking Glass** (1963) and **The Two Mysteries** (1966).
- 2 Nürnberg and Venice were reputed centres of manufacturing mirrors. http://www.mirrorresilvering.com/a_brief_history_of_mirrors.htm (last accessed 24 July 2012).
- 3 See for details, <http://www.designboom.com/history/mirror.html> (last accessed 24 July 2012).
- 4 Similarly, in his **The Treachery of Images** (1928-29), Magritte captioned a realist image of a tobacco pipe with the statement 'This is not a pipe'. This disruption challenges realist assumptions about the relationship between the real object and its artistic representation; but more importantly, the (dissolved) canvas suddenly reappears between the spectator and the image.

- 5 The term 'materiality' refers to "different dimensions of experience, or dimensions beyond (or below) what we generally consider experience to be", as suggested by Brown (2010:49). Materiality is not superficially limited to the physical existence of an object (ibid.).
 - 6 Nandita K.S. (1969-1999), a bilingual poet from Kerala, committed suicide two years after scribbling this poem in her personal diary. She was deeply influenced by Sylvia Plath, as her poem quoted in the beginning suggests. Her poems are collected in the posthumous anthology **Nanditayude Kavithakal [Poems of Nandita]** (Papiyon, 2005, Calicut).
 - 7 See Mulvey (1975) for more on the spectator's identification with the male protagonist on the screen.
 - 8 Radars and the Hubble space telescope are different kinds of mirrors that reflect wave lengths beyond the visible range of light in the spectrum (Pendergrast 2007:2).
 - 9 The film was remade in Hollywood as **The Ring** (2002).
 - 10 In fantasy movies, mirrors/screens function as a window to a fantasy world the individual/spectator can cross over to. This is but highly pleasurable and thrilling, instead of being horrific. **The Chronicles of Narnia** (2005, 2008 and 2010) and **Alice in Wonderland** (2010) are examples.
 - 11 In **Ringu**, this changed materiality of the TV screen can be reversed only through an intense, collective practice of spectatorship, enhanced by the (illegal) copying, circulation and watching of the video cassette.
 - 12 **Eagle Eye** (2008) is another movie that depicts this tension, where a supercomputer assumes autonomy, creating havoc.
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WHAT DOES THE MOVING IMAGE DESIRE?

Ayesha Hameed

I am thinking about residues and afterlives. It is over a year since the death of Muammar Gaddafi, and this event has been superseded by so much more in Libya and by so many other violent events. Right now the news is saturated the world over with the recent rape and murder of a woman on a bus in Delhi, and the blogosphere and social media are full of the most incisive accounts and photographs of demonstrations, vigils and militant men and women up in arms, in an attempt to come to terms with the horror and outrage shared among so many.

So why talk about the images surrounding the death of an antagonist who was so contentious to begin with and whose death isn't even recent news? What I think is that the residual images of a slightly aged news story might reveal the architectonics of how moving images as news circulate and gain meaning and resonance. This follows Walter Benjamin's method of looking at the decay of the Paris Arcades as a clue to his own time. We see our present moment through images recently passed that have lost the gloss of the new.

Speaking about the death of Gaddafi confronts an event so violent and images so difficult to watch that it forces me to make a distinction between the event itself and its representation. And to cross that threshold is to tempt fate and to become complicit with the profane violence that these images record. But of course it is impossible not to cross that limit as that limit is where it all happens.

Shortly after Gaddafi's death, British journalist Jeremy Paxman interviewed filmmaker David Cronenberg on 26 October 2011, and asked him what he thought of the cell phone images that captured the moments leading up to the death of Gaddafi.

Jeremy Paxman: What did you think when you saw these images of Gaddafi?

David Cronenberg: What surprised me was that Gaddafi, who was never a favourite of mine, I was suddenly feeling quite sorry for him. I felt huge empathy, and it was quite striking to me that I felt that way. It surprised me, and I think it was because I felt at that moment he had been stripped of all context, and he was a human being who was suffering and being, you know, assaulted.

JP: Do you think that the instant availability of that sort of footage, and it is *now* instantly available (and we didn't show most of it there), it is pretty horrific. Do you think it affects us? How does it affect us?

DC: Well, as I say you can make a case for it enhancing our sense of empathy for people, you know. I mean, it's easy to say we are being desensitised because we see a lot of it, but I don't really think that is the function. You know, that's something that's been mentioned to me because my earlier films were all horror films, and people would say, "Well, do your films desensitise people?" and I think not, because I think people really understand there is a difference when you are seeing a fictional context.

JP: Absolutely. They understand the artifice involved in cinema. *That* is not artifice.

DC: It is not artifice, and it draws forth a completely different reaction, I think, from us. I remember looking up on the Internet and watching a beheading, and I wish I hadn't seen it. I mean, it was so disturbing.

JP: Why did you do it?

DC: You know, I felt I needed to confront the reality of what was going on.

JP: But you didn't need to...

DC: ...and what really disturbed me about it was the perpetrators of this beheading were incredibly self righteous. I mean, you could see they thought they were doing a wonderful, sacred, holy thing, whereas on the human level, it was absolutely hideous.

JP: But you were drawn to it.

DC: I wasn't, no, I actually had to compel myself to watch it, almost feeling that I needed to confront what was going on in the world at the time. I never watched another one.

JP: Why did you feel like you needed to confront it?

DC: Um, because you read about it, but no written description can really deliver to you the full texture of it.

JP: But you know exactly what happens just from the word 'beheading'. You know what happens when someone is beheaded.

DC: No, you don't...

JP: I suggest you do. Their head is cut off, and they're dead. It's a horrible thing to do to someone.

DC: No, no, no, but you know, when you think of the guillotine, and you think oh you've seen it in movies, and you've never seen it because there was no film at the time of the French Revolution, the guillotine comes down, *schoonk!* And the head falls off, and we've seen it... in movies. This beheading took ages, it took half an hour and it was agonising, it was not even like a slaughter house, it was much more efficient. It was a ritual...¹

When I first watched this interview, my first thought was: Why ask the director of films like *Crash* and *A History of Violence* about this? What could he possibly add to this discussion? The interview reveals the complicity of desires created in fiction and news. There is a cinematic desire of the news which shatters the expectation of reality created by film. In the interview, Cronenberg initially distinguishes between fictional violence and real violence, but later on, when he talks about the beheading he saw on the Internet, he argues that *schoonk!* our expectations of how violence plays out in the real world are created by the cinema.

But more striking in this conversation is Cronenberg's ethical compulsion to witness the beheading. What does it mean for him to be compelled to see these videos rather than be drawn to them? What makes him a special kind of witness? And what is the nature of the desire of a fiction film director for these other images? Does how we read these images through one another translate into the need of one kind of image for another?

Desire can be seen as a kind of projection of one image onto another. According to WJT Mitchell, we confer more power to images than they actually have.² Images, in his conception, function from a subaltern position that desires rather than dominates. What images desire varies, I am sure, but in this context, I would contend that they desire one another and through this create a circuitry, an economy of meaning. What links them together, the thin matter of desire, is a form of projection where fictional images covet news and vice versa, and viewers blur the distinction between both in order to create a chain of intelligible meaning of a world made uncanny through violent events.

What would an image's projection look like? Lorraine Daston describes the history of the concept of projection as a quest for a purely receptive object that would take on the imprint of the projecting subject.³ The normal course of projection is when there is a clear distinction between projecting (active) subject and receptive (passive) object. When these distinctions are blurred and the receptive object begins to spill its own projections outwards, then all hell breaks loose to a most pathological and wondrous effect – so that subject and object connect to and penetrate one another.

Images that project onto one another constitute such a reversal. Rather than simply being the repository or passive matter projected on by their viewer, their subaltern desire spans news images and fiction and wondering viewers, and from these arise a constellation of projections and monstrous affects that are all the more delineated in the violent imagery in the images of Gaddafi's death.

Lots has been said about the images and videos that have circulated on Gaddafi's death, so in a way, what is there to add? Except that these images and those subsequent images used to take stock of this event still have an uneasy afterlife. What many of the editorials in *The Guardian* and the BBC and elsewhere share is a sense that there is a 'too much' to the violence of the images, as they enter into ambivalent debates on what the ethics of showing these images are.

There is a 'too much' to the violence, this is 'pornography', this is excessive. But I want to unpack this word, *pornographic*, when it is attached to violence. I think it's too easy. What lies in this excess, what do we do with this excess, how do we narrativise this excess? Who is this excess for? Or really, who are these images for?

In a *Guardian* editorial days after, Jonathan Jones writes:

When I look at this photograph, what do I see? War. War and nothing else. How many times do we need to be told that war is hell? The phrase has lost all meaning for us. Think about what hell is. Hell, in paintings by Bosch, is chaos. It is meaningless, monstrous and lacks any place of safety or redemption. This picture of Gaddafi dead is a day in the life of hell, also known as war: a corpse photographed for souvenirs, displayed to satisfy the oppressed, in a moment of violent gratification. When NATO intervened in Libya, what we see in this picture was probably the best – not the worst – outcome on offer. And we should be grimly glad of it. What fantasy makes us long for some impossibly dignified and humane end to a bloody conflict?⁴

In bringing up and linking to Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, Jones' editorial is not unique. It isn't the first that refers to Capital A Art in order to take stock of the affect of these images.



In fact, what I was struck by was how many art *writers*, not art *historians*, not *Middle East news reporters*, were jumping into this conversation and turning to the old masters and to classical myth to somehow account for what happens to us when we look at these images. So we have references to Holbein, to the Roman Emperor Elagabalus, to Hogarth's images of dissection.

And this turn, I would argue, is not simply an aestheticisation of this event, or even the revealing of its immanent aesthetics, where the event itself produces its own imagery that contains an aesthetic quality that is germane to its historical and political existence.

Perhaps Jones is nearer the mark when he talks at the end about the element of fantasy in imagining a bloodless end to war. But this is the kind of fantasy that is stillborn at its very moment of conception because there is a stronger fantastical element it has to contend with – Gaddafi himself. Because what else was Gaddafi's life but the most fantastical, emblematic rise and fall? This is a fantasy in the real world, a fable come down to earth, a fairy tale told through the detritus of the Internet rather than in the pages of a storybook.

In the multiple images surrounding the capture and execution of Gaddafi, there is not one image that claims definitively to pinpoint his moment of death, and the 'secondary literature', the editorials and analyses, makes much of this *aporia*. With the loss of the moment of death, the narrative of his epic fall falters, for we don't know if what we see is a living *being*, a person, or a corpse, a dead *thing*. What we see is a stretched-out depiction of this liminal state that robs the story of its catharsis.

What we have then is a fable without a moral, that cannot delegate a subject of responsibility, a negative of a fairy tale. And this affective void becomes the progenitor of a new set of images, sublime, high art images that we culturally can hang our hats on.

But of course it is more than that. Jack Zipes describes how fairytales are placeholders for the desire for the *heimlich*, the homely, from a position of the wandering protagonist and of the reader who leaves herself and her world to follow the protagonist home.⁵ This tale, both magical and profane, leaves no breadcrumb trails, no transition from the extreme violence of the images in the news to news stories more mundane, there is no moral, no closure to the violence, no attribution of responsibility. No good guys and no bad guys and no moment of death. Which means: no moment of life.

Into this uncompleted desire for home, for the return to the known, rushes the image. Not simply in the emblematic piling on of images by Holbein and Hogarth, but the materiality

Garden of Earthly Delights,
Hieronymus Bosch (selection),
dated between 1480 and 1505



BLAKE GOPNIK on art

...and pleasures

In *Newsweek* & *TOD* / In the *Washington Post* / On contemporary art / On old and modern masters / On photography / On design / On pleasures / Videos / Obsessions / Questions? / RSS / Archive



Muammar Gaddafi in death, below Hans Holbein The Younger's great "Dead Christ," in the Basel Kunstmuseum.

Images of Gaddafi, taken Thursday as he was battered and bleeding and then dead, are everywhere, and everyone should find them hard to look at. They operate as war porn and gore porn, not much different from the ton of less newsworthy carnage that floats free in cyberspace, and that probably shouldn't. But we still need to look at the Gaddafi shots, I think, because pornography is only part of their story. To my Christian...





"Gaddafi's Condoleezza Rice Photo Album Found At Tripoli Compound", *The Huffington Post*, 25 August 2011;

"I love her very much":

Photographs found in Gaddafi lair of Condoleezza Rice, the tyrant's 'darling black African woman', *The Daily Mail Online*, 26 August 2011;

"Is this the Yankees fan who shot Gaddafi? The 20-year-old who claims to have shot dictator during brutal melee in despot's final moments", *The Daily Mail Online*, 21 October 2011

of the images circulated take on a new life. The value of the 'poor' image, as Hito Steyerl calls it,⁶ lies in its low resolution, in its ease of circulation – a valorisation of the state of *unheimlich* that pulls away from the fairytale's and fable's desire for home and resolution and towards new and proliferating poor images.

This ghastly fairytale come down to earth, proliferates into new magical, transformative objects – trophy images whose radioactivity bears the weight of an excess of signification. Thus we have an itemisation of effects: Gaddafi's golden gun, Gaddafi's golden pants, the sewer where he was found (metaphor made real in an 'I told you so' way you can't even make up) increasingly covered with graffiti, Gaddafi's body lying in a state of profanation, the secret and unverified images of his burial (in an unmarked grave in the night) and the prehistory of these objects: the effects of his house ransacked before his death, the private made public, the pictures of Condoleezza Rice. And finally, the impossible-to-empathise-with Hillary Clinton, whose laughter does not dispel the mythical but rather stretches out its dream state. These proliferating objects are like fairy tale devices that the poor image offers in lieu of a moral.

I have a final question. If the images are marked by a lack of resolution, by the negation of the moment of death, then what, in fact, are these images of?



"Hillary Clinton reacts to news of Muammar Gaddafi's capture in Libya – Video", *The Guardian*, 20 October 2011

Steyerl calls such images spam: images that break the civil contract of photography.⁷ Spam creates a negative portrait of those who stay deliberately outside of the frame. This extends Deleuze's interest in how the frame calls attention to what is outside of it, to the unique life of the poor image. If *within* the frame the suspension of the threshold between life and death gives new life to these magical objects, then what happens *outside* of the frame? Or of what or of whom outside of the frame is this a negative portrait of?

In this image, we see a glimpse of the chaos of the moment, and then a grounding of the image in the golden gun that is brandished. There is an implied violence that exists beyond the



"Gaddafi dead: Chaos and a golden gun at sewer where former dictator was captured", *The Telegraph*, 20 October 2011

explanatory title at the bottom. This is an affection image – intimate and close up – of *nothing*. Or more precisely, a close up of the notion of movement and its pixelated, choppy quality that dissolves figure into ground. This is the portrait, painted in negation, of blobs of slow moving colour which tell the story of giant pixels, images light enough to be easily uploaded and circulated. But more than that the life portrayed is in the threshold itself – the frame that shakes, that shows the contingency and thus the life of the person holding the camera that we know is a cell phone, who is running down the street and following the crowd, who is the crowd and who, we know, had a moment to stop and think about the further life of the image as he uploads it and disappears even further from the frame. ■

Notes

- 1 Transcript of Jeremy Paxman's interview with David Cronenberg, **BBC Newsnight**, 26 October 2011. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/9624643.stm> (last accessed 10 January 2013).
- 2 W.J.T. Mitchell. "What Do Pictures Really Want?" **October** 77 (Summer 1996), pp. 71-82.
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- 7 Hito Steyerl. "The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation". In **e-flux** 32.

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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8840141/Gaddafi-dead-Chaos-and-a-golden-gun-at-sewer-where-former-dictator-was-captured.html>

TAKING FLIGHT

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE DEPTHS OF AN IDEAS FACTORY

Janine Ramlochan

A. I spend most of my time exploring... usually the minds, lives and communities beyond the big city office towers. I return to the .ppt slide, seeking to bring to my workspace some understanding of the world outside our coffee-shop-to-boardroom existence. Sitting in people's houses, rummaging through cupboards, closets and fridges to understand their daily habits, then exploring how they process, relate and react to the current issues affecting their lives. My role is to connect human insight and creativity in a way that fuels new ideas for our (usually multinational) clients.

In an ad agency, .ppt is my canvas, more by necessity than choice. It is seen as a sharing mechanism, a collaboration tool, a vehicle for disseminating ideation and a platform through which to draw consensus. Yet for me it was really just masquerading as all of these things. Corresponding to the pattern of '*a movement*' in both cyberspace and physical space, an idea becomes a nomadic narrative whose path skips across .ppt slides and the tongues of boardroom participants in the process of becoming fully realised.

Initially, it boils down to a creative brief, narrowed to a handful of words, chosen specifically to inspire and fuel

creativity. Over time, you begin to recognise when an idea takes flight. No longer is the creative brief relegated to the boardroom table or the depths of someone's hard drive. Instead, it grows wings, flying off .ppt slides, instantly capturing imaginations around the table. It occupies peoples' minds as they walk down office corridors, permeates water-cooler conversation and begins to grace the screens of tablets and mobile phones across the organisation. Individuals take increasing ownership of an idea as the other options reveal themselves to be lacking in comparison. It becomes their own idea, regardless of where it originated. Prompting or persuading is rarely required.

The creative environment of an ad agency has always struck me as unusual – an ecosystem which carefully conspires to meld curiosity, creativity and aesthetics. For me, it was a means of exploring the changes unfolding around us through a prism of mainstream consciousness. At the heart of this illusory world is a contract. Not the one written in ink with our clients, but an unwritten emotional contract with the public. The work requires a conspiracy of emotion between the material we create and the audience we create it for. It

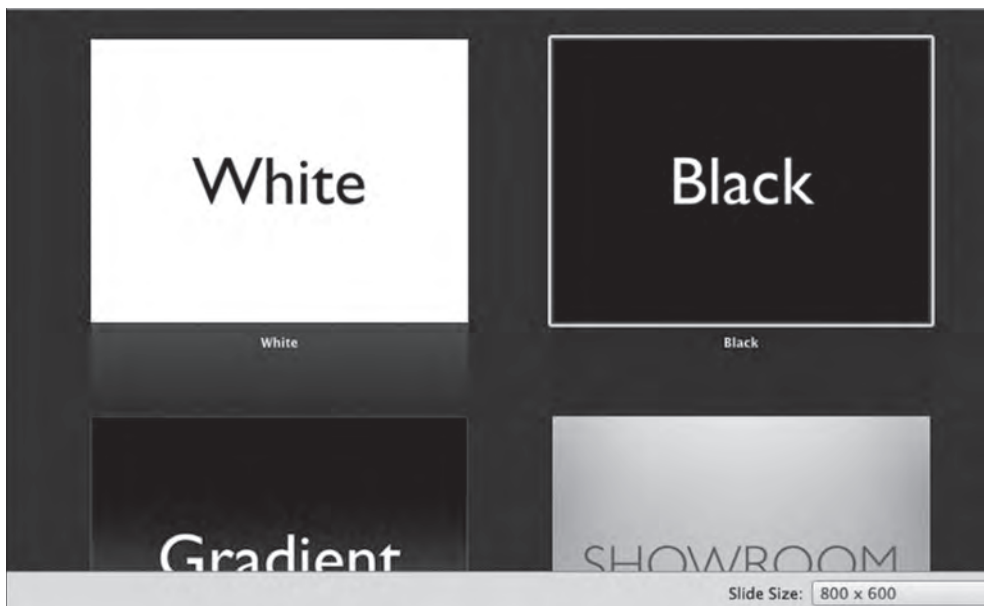
hinges on engaging the audience's imagination in absolute truth, latent or otherwise, in exchange for action. Unlike an independent writer, whose work pervades an audience's consciousness over a period of time, an advertising agency's task requires immediacy – the emotional compulsion to act... usually the compulsion to buy.

Many would say I make it sound far too easy. Within a cross-functional (and often cross-cultural) team, each individual brings different thinking. Differing priorities, disciplines and approaches add layers to the task. Comprehension can be a struggle. Agreement is sometimes elusive. Any artist will tell you it takes focus to nurture your own voice. Crafting a voice on behalf of a client is no different. In an ad agency, the work flows through a network of people, where the ideas are discussed, analysed and modified; reviewed again and, with client approval, advanced to a creative product; then disseminated to the public. Material produced in the form of briefs, documents and creative product is itself evidence of social relations congealed in material form. At the heart of this process is a comfortable tension – resulting in an environment for ideas to be challenged and made stronger.¹

B. From a cultural studies perspective, an extensive amount of literature exists examining advertising as a producer of symbols and a form of social discourse. A brand in and of itself becomes a ritual symbol both inside and outside of an ad agency. Ritual symbols have three main characteristics – they condense a range of meanings, unifying them in a cohesive emotional whole; they are multivocalic, simultaneously expressing many points of view; and they retain ambiguity by shifting and adapting as necessary.²

Ritual symbols themselves are projections, for those creating them and for the public that embraces them and catapults them forward. Malefyt and Morais' recent ethnographic study on advertising agencies reveals how a brand is approached with a similar 'sacred reverence and ritual etiquette', suggesting how formal structures and social elements drive the direction in reinventing ritual symbols. Neither the brand nor the relationships are static.

The brand and the ad agency are in constant movement, and both represent a space of possibilities where ritual transformations occur. Understanding ritual transformation then becomes central to the structure and process that



channels social behaviour towards purposeful ends.³ I intentionally blur the lines between a brand and a social movement. While all brands do not become movements, neither will most social causes, sometimes despite the efforts of those who champion them. A social movement which sweepingly captures the imaginations of the public into a tornado of sorts becomes a brand phenomenon, and vice versa, if it has the characteristics of ritual symbol in the creation process, in the experience it creates and in the meaning it holds.

C. It is difficult to draw further parallels between the ad agency creative process and social movements. The human impetus is where the similarities diverge. The decision-making process in purchasing behaviour is considerably different from that of participating in a social movement, particularly in the face of political hegemony. It becomes important to consider the contextual realities of the social movements of our time and how they coalesce.

The term 'globalisation' generally indicates the social process, highly influenced by technological development, which has created spatial connections and interdependence across a greater number of (previously isolated) actors at economic, political, cultural and communications intersections.⁴ The rhetoric of globalisation tends to gloss over a range of issues. An example is the escalating disparity in income – the income gap between the richest fifth and the poorest fifth of the world's population has gone from 30:1 in 1960, to 60:1 in 1990, to 74:1 in 1997, and is projected to increase exponentially by 2020 – illuminating the sentiments of a large swathe of people who increasingly feel left behind.⁵

It is easy to see that the rise of social media platforms and the adoption of technology have provided a formal structure, giving transparency and voice to many where none previously existed. Unlike traditional mass media, technology tools – particularly the Internet, mobile phones and social media – not only facilitate the creation and dissemination

of content, but are also able to by-pass choke points and traditional gatekeepers to increase the flow of content distribution and access. This has begun to alter the balance of power between citizens and governments.⁶

During the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian Arab Spring protests (over a range of frustrations – unemployment, corruption, political freedoms, inflation, etc.), Twitter became a key source of real-time logistical co-ordination of information and discussion, both within the region and globally. Both revolutions featured prominent use of social media by activists organising demonstrations and by those disseminating or discussing the events.⁷ An evolving relationship emerged between traditional news media organisations and independent actors who consume mainstream news stories and remix and re-interpret them, in often high-quality content which stands alongside professionally produced content. News no longer emerged from a handful of stable media outlets, but from a hybrid and dynamic information network whose structure and influence were malleable to how an undefined number of actors behaved.⁸

Evidence suggests roles have emerged for actors who drive the purpose and direction in a social movement, while social media platform functionality accentuates the coalescing of trended activity and invites participation from further afield. One example of this was during the 2009 Iranian election when Twitter users all over the world altered profile images and changed their location to Tehran in a show of solidarity.⁹

The importance of this confluence of activity is perhaps best encapsulated in a quote by a professor at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, discussing the Yo Soy 132 movement. Following a pre-election rally-turned-student-protest in 2012, which quickly migrated online and went viral, one of the university's professors offered that

[Previously], it would have been a non-event which was only known in the underground and always

questioned... was it real? Was it manipulated? Is the information real? Ten years ago, this would've gone down as an urban legend, and today [the protest] was a campaign turning-point and a fact.¹⁰

Understanding communication flow has become entangled with understanding political contention and power. It is the growing struggle between independent actors and hegemonic entities which now determines what is discussed, how and by whom – and, consequently, the impact on systemic change.¹¹ While communications will never be the sole influence in political change – levels of Information Communication Technology (ICT) penetration and GDP matter, as do state capacity and public views of regime legitimacy, etc. – ICT plays a role by altering the communications landscape and amplifying political pressure. In response, states have begun to take sides, with some actively promoting ICT for its democratising impact, while others are building tomorrow's information dykes and dams.¹²

D. Although the wave has yet to crest into an internationally recognised social movement, the ongoing Mexican drug war provides texture to this discussion. The drug war conflict centres on drug cartels fighting amongst themselves for regional control and against local government forces. Journalists have increasingly become targeted in the cartels' attempt to silence the news media, which they see as damaging to their activities. Violence against journalists has significantly limited the quality of information available to the public, both in Mexico and the rest of the world.

A recent study, "Narcotweets: Social Media in Wartime", explores the use of social media as a participatory news platform in the wake of damaged state and media structures in Mexico. As cartels gained an increasing hold over news media, the control of information has shifted to social media, where an emergence of 'citizen curators' has begun aggregating real time news to fill the *information vacuum*.

Understandably, many of the citizen curators have engaged in this activity anonymously. With weakened information flow and diminished journalistic practices, inaccuracy and misinformation have become a concern. Government attempts to criminalise misreporting add yet another layer inhibiting clarity.¹³ Mexico's current environment illuminates an interesting picture of emerging practices in social media, oscillating between political protests and existing on the fringes of a warzone.

A Veracruz journalist, who continues to report on drug violence, was asked about the impact of getting out her story, which the interviewer saw as potentially lethal (to her and her family) and unlikely to make a difference in an environment where institutions are inoperative.

It is like throwing messages in bottles into the sea and thinking that maybe nobody is picking them up... but one day, someone will find them. That's the everyday effort of journalism here... with the advantage that we have the sea.¹⁴

E. Looking at this through the lens of an ad agency illuminates a human dynamic – the human impetus to self-organise towards meaningful ends when left to *our own devices*. This seems to be the case, regardless of whether it is at store-closing time, election time or in wartime.

Social movements and public use of media, rather than the business of media, are the clear drivers of changing media habits. From a commercial perspective, I wonder if our current history of organisational media evolution will be characterised by our own self-imposed limitations projected onto a media landscape which continues to inspire, fuel and frustrate media industries everywhere. The boundaries of media no longer exist except in our minds. Meanwhile, individuals, artisans and activists of all genres have begun to flourish in their experimentation, broadening the spaces in-between. ■

Notes

- 1 Timothy De Waal Malefyt and Robert J. Morais. **Advertising and Anthropology: Ethnographic Practices and Cultural Perspectives** (Berg Publishers, 2012, New York), pp. 10-11.
- 2 David Kertzer, **Ritual, Politics and Power** (Yale University Press, 1988, New Haven, Conn.), quoted *ibid.*, p. 37; *ibid.*, p. 6.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.
- 4 Danilo Zolo. (Eds.) Alan Ware and Vincent Hoffmann-Martinot, **Globalization: An Overview** (ECPR Press, 2007, University of Essex, UK), p. 1.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 18; David McNally, **Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism** (Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2002, Manitoba, Canada), pp. 45-46.
- 6 Itay Wand, **States and Societies in the Digital Arena: ICT, State Capacity and Political Change in Asia** (Master's Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2012). Available at: https://circle.ubc.ca/bitstream/handle/2429/43234/ubc_2012_fall_wand_itay.pdf?sequence=1; Wand, **Three Questions: ICT, State Capacity and Political Change in Asia**, available at the Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada website, <http://www.asiapacific.ca/thenationalconversationonasia/events-and-activities/three-questions/Three-Questions-ICT-State-Capacity-and-Political-Change-in-A> (last accessed 17 October 2012).
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- 13 Andrés Monroy-Hernández et al. "Narcotweets: Social Media in

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- 14 "Mexican Media: Es Muy Complicado", **On the Media** radio podcast, 22 June 2012, National Public Radio, WNYC, Chicago.

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WHEN GHOSTS COME CALLING

RE-‘PROJECTING’ THE DISAPPEARED MUSES OF MALAYALAM CINEMA

Darshana Sreedhar + Vinu Abraham

I have always been interested in this theme of survival, the meaning of which is not to be added on to living and dying. It is originary: life is living on, life is survival [la vie est survie]. To survive in the usual sense of the term means to continue to live, but also to live after death.

Jacques Derrida, “Learning to Live Finally”, p. 26

In his last interview to *Le Monde*, given two months before his death in 2004 and later published as “Learning to Live Finally”, Derrida ruminates on survival, which for him straddles two nodes. One entails a vivacious desire to explore life in all its fullness, unscathed by an imminent death looming large. The other is the possibility of a life after death, experienced like a silhouette, awaiting its turn to be recalled to the present. This ‘return’ is facilitated not only by the desire to re-live the past, but also to pepper the present with a melancholic nostalgia, something which could trigger past memories back to the present. The spectral presence of what was earlier a dim memory becomes the constitutive feature of the present, upsetting the easy progression of time by proposing that time is simultaneously haunted by past and future. This spectral nature of the past haunts Malayalam cinema as well and, over the last five years, has prompted the production of four films that employ a similar thematic to look nostalgically back at the lost lives and narratives of the silver screen. This trend becomes instrumental in re-projecting and bringing to the limelight moments relegated to the trashcan of history by pumping new energy into the process of memorialising. This return of the ‘revenants’ of Malayalam cinema has a disquieting quality to it as it is driven by an obsessive and repetitive momentum.

The cluster of films we examine here are *Vellaripravinte Changathi* (*The Friend of the White Dove*, Akku Akbar, 2011), *Naayika* (*The Heroine*, Jayaraj, 2011), *Thirakatha* (*The Script*, Ranjith, 2008) and *Celluloid* (Kamal, 2013). All four films take on a ‘retro’ mode right from the pre-production phase, interspersing fact and fiction with memory and loss. We approach this cluster of films from two perspectives. The first examines how the ‘disappeared’ figures and forgotten events of Malayalam cinema are brought back to the realm of visibility by being part of film narratives and publicity posters. Alongside this, we focus on the role of the ‘creative film historian’ employed by these films in their retro-journey into the past of Malayalam cinema; this figure, we reckon, can mediate “discursive stratifications and ephemeral formations” (Miller, n.d.) to produce new discourses.

Narrative Exorcism: Recalling the Spectres of the Past

To be haunted by a ghost is to remember what one has never lived in the present, to remember what in essence, has never had the form of presence. Film is ‘phantomachia’... the future belongs to ghosts.

Derrida, Stiegler *et al.* (2002)



The use of retrospective orbits to answer the call to remembrance given by the spectres of the past is a prominent device used in all these films. In *Thirakatha*, we see Akbar, a film director, in search of Malavika, an actress of yesteryears, whose *disappearance* from both onscreen and off-screen life was a sensational story in the 1980s. On the other hand, *Naayika* takes on the narrative of Aleena, a documentary filmmaker, to trace the sudden *disappearance* of Grace, who ruled the silver screen in the 1960s and 70s. In both these films, there seems to be a constant interplay between pre-production publicity, which clearly and vocally assigns a referent to the storyline, and post-release controversy, undergirding the filmmaker's reluctance to subscribe to the earlier positions. In most cases, the *imaginary referent* becomes the ghost figure haunting the lives of not just one, but many, both onscreen and off-screen, thereby flattening all attempts to identify the real source behind the story. For instance, *Thirakatha*, publicised widely as a tribute to the late actress Sreevidya, became in a short time an "unpleasant controversy" and gave rise to much speculation and misgiving.¹ Ranjith, the film's director, writer and co-producer, had to convene a press conference in Kozhikode to clarify that the film was not a *real story fictionalised*, but was intended in homage to many actresses of times gone by who vanished from the *vellithira* (limelight) as they found themselves caught in the interstices of a hero-centric production industry. On a closer look at *Thirakatha's* pre-production phase, however, we have a different narrative altogether. More than the 'tribute' Ranjith claims his film to be, there were allegations of his tarnishing the memory of Sreevidya, whose life was marked by a series of tragic happenings. From the publicity posters showing Priyamanu (the film's lead actress) alongside Sreevidya, with the text, "For the heavenly beauty, who has loved cinema and left us midway", to the strategic use of an opening slide before the credits to foreground Sreevidya as the film's inspiration, there were instances mobilised in the narrative to connect the 'real' and 'reel' lives. The tumultuous but

Publicity poster for *Thirakatha* showing Sreevidhya on the left and Priyamanu on the right. The text above the main title loosely translates as "For the heavenly beauty, who has loved cinema and left us midway"

short-lived romance between Sreevidya and co-actor Kamal Hasan became the cornerstone for weaving the narrative into a 'pastiche', liberally borrowing from the gossip columns familiar to film viewers. The inter-textual references to film texts were such that it brought a vibrant community of online bloggers to open up the interpretative possibilities which the film offered when read alongside the off-screen references. In the words of a blogger who uses 'Vids' as his/her user name, the viewing experience of *Thirakatha* was tantamount to a guess game, putting the viewers on toe, right from the first shot. Events, sequences, people whom we have seen or known appear in a glimpse, vanishing from the frame within seconds, so fast that even an avid film buff finds it impossible to draw the connections. This can be seen, for instance, in the use of Mohanlal's mannerisms in the character played by Anoop Menon, and in the naming of his debut film as *Kazhinja Manjukalattu* [*The Last Winter*], which closely resembles the title of Mohanlal's debut film, *Manjil Virinja Pookal* [*Flowers that Blossomed in the Mist*] – all part of the popular memory associated with the 80s.²

Another webpage exploring similar questions was Old Malayalam Cinema, where the respondents stressed through the comments thread the need to memorialise 'forgotten' moments, conjoining it to the dominant narratives.³ What actually triggered the 'controversy' was Ranjith's revealing that he had first conceived the film's plot after a visit Kamal Hasan paid Sreevidya during her battle with terminal breast cancer. Ranjith was quoted as saying, "When Srividya was ill, she wasn't willing to meet anyone from the film industry. The first thought of *Thirakkatha* came to me when I heard of her one-hour meeting with Kamal" (*ibid.*). This instance from real life seeped into the film narrative as well. A statement from Ranjith, who is believed to have had access to Sreevidya's personal documents, on her influence on the film was taken as a tacit admission to his role as a 'retriever of lost narratives' and of the film as the culmination of such an endeavour. Ranjith even appears in the film as Aby Kuruvila, an associate director whose old letters and diary entries become the lead for Akbar to trace Malavika's life. But more than Aby, who appears in just five scenes, it seems more likely that Ranjith is taking on the persona of Akbar, the successful director in search of a *convincing script*, as a last ditch effort to give the spirit its due.

The next film under consideration, *Naayika*, takes the retro-journey to a new level. Starring Sarada, one of Malayalam cinema's *nityaharita naayikas* (evergreen heroines), and promoting the film as her return to the screen after a career break, *Naayika* is projected in its pre-production publicity as a tribute to silver screen actresses of yore. This is seen not only in the interviews given by Jayaraj and Deedi Damodaran, the film's director and scriptwriter respectively, but also in the opening credits, which feature photographs of movie heroines from the 1960s onwards, accompanied by an evocative soundtrack from films of that era. Damodaran was quoted as saying that "none of the reel women [of today] seem to have anything to do with real women... *Naayika* will be a woman of flesh and blood, not the novel woman who inhabits our films", while Jayaraj said, "The efforts have been to bring back the memories of those old times in the minds of the viewers".⁴ In a way, it seems as if there lurks behind such statements a desire to delve into the past of Malayalam cinema in search of a 'real' person who will vouch for the imagination associated with the female lead. But here too, off-screen and onscreen lives coalesce as past, memory and nostalgia are mobilised as markers to revisit times gone by. The most prominent instance worth mentioning is the incorporation in the narrative of the events leading to the suicide of the 1970s actress, Vijayashree. In the course of filming her last production, *Ponnapuram Kotta* (Kunchacko, 1973), there was a sequence captured that showed Vijayashree's dress falling off, partially revealing her bare body. The subsequent appearance of this scene in the film appalled her and is widely believed to have been the prime reason for her suicide. What *Naayika* gets at, through scattered references throughout, is to hint at the real life figures allegedly behind



Publicity poster for *Naayika* with Padmapriya and Jayaram in the foreground. Padmapriya plays the role of a young Sharada in the film while a picture of Sharada in the present, looms large in the background. The visual style of the poster emulates the 'look' and 'feel' of the 1960s

Vijayashree's tragic end. There were even rumours that the film's director, Kunchacko, had had a role in her death, with the film going so far as to suggest that he murdered her. Avoiding any direct reference to Kunchacko, the film instead brings forgotten narratives back to the limelight by recreating Vijayashree's wardrobe malfunction with a cast selected for its physical resemblance to the real people involved. In the film, the character of Stephen, the producer of a movie named *Kunnattoor Kotta* (a word play on Vijayashree's ill-fated last film), is played by an actor who resembles Navodaya Appachan, a film producer and brother of Kunchacko. While Appachan's Navodaya Studio features as Greenland Studio in the narrative, the most crucial part of the narrative is constructed by mobilising another event from the recent past

– Appachan's receiving the J.C. Daniel Award, the lifetime achievement felicitation instituted by the Government of Kerala for outstanding contribution to Malayalam cinema. If in real life Navodaya Appachan was the recipient of the award in 2010, the film narrative in a knee-jerk response shows Stephen being arrested from the venue of the award ceremony when his role in the death of Vani (Vijayashree's filmic equivalent) is brought to light. If in real life the perpetrators of Vijayashree's death went scot-free, redemption is made possible in the film narrative by deflecting the loss into Stephen's being made to reckon with the gruesome murder he was responsible for. The broader framework within which *Naayika* places itself is, in a way, a continuation of the quest for the lost heroine inaugurated by *Thirakatha*, thus making the revisiting of the past a running thread. We see the 'lost figure' conjured up as if she is guided into the present moment and has let herself be led in the process of retrieving forgotten stories.

Publicity still from *Celluloid*. The picture on the placard on the left shows the poster of the original film in front of a set made to look like the entrance of the old Capitol Cinema. The poster has the title of the film in Malayalam and the English translation along with the name of the director in Malayalam. In the foreground, actor Prithiviraj as J.C. Daniel



The same quest for the 'lost heroine' links the earlier two films with *Celluloid*, a biopic on J.C. Daniel, director of the first Malayalam film, *Vikatakumaran* (*The Lost Boy*, 1930). *Celluloid* brings before us the lost narrative of *Vikatakumaran* and also the forgotten life of its lead actress, P.K. Rosy. Turning away from the mythology-related themes on which early cinema in other parts of the country thrived, *Vikatakumaran* was rooted in social reality. For

Daniel, who had donned the role of producer, director, script writer, editor and lead actor for the film, it was a crucial venture, a do-or-die situation, one that could either win him accolades or sink him into oblivion. Sadly, it was the latter that transpired. The Thiruvananthapuram audience that thronged the Capitol Theatre on 23 October 1930, the day of the film's opening, had been drawn by the publicity posters that claimed to have, for the first time, a woman on screen. The mostly orthodox Hindu audience, however, was outraged at the sight of Rosy – in real life, a Dalit Christian convert – in the role of the film's female protagonist, a Nair. The film was instantly mired in controversy, triggering off a series of disruptions that affected the professional and personal lives of all involved. Daniel had to single-handedly bear the film's financial losses, leaving him in utter penury; later, his application for a government pension for indigent artists was rejected point blank. The post-Independence linguistic re-organisation of states had its part to play here: the black-and-white rules of bureaucracy could not accommodate someone born in what was now deemed Tamil Nadu as a 'Keralite', notwithstanding the fact that he had spent more than 50 years of his life in the part of the country now called Kerala. For Rosy, too, *Vikatakumaran* changed the trajectory of her life to a point of no return. Disowned by her community and under the double ostracism of caste and gender, she fled her hometown, Thiruvananthapuram, to take refuge in a remote part of Nagercoil in present-day Tamil Nadu, where she remained under the alias 'Rajamma' until she died.⁵ Inadvertently, the film's title, *Vikatakumaran* (*The Lost Boy*), became thus an evocative marker for a string of losses – Daniel's financial loss, the loss of Rosy's narrative in public memory and the subsequent 'loss' also of the film's print. If the depiction of the hero (Daniel) kissing a flower in Rosy's hair was what started the uproar, *Vikatakumaran* strangely inherited the same fate as its protagonist. The pelted stones that destroyed the Capitol's screen were not just a rupture but a catalyst that initiated debates as to what would constitute a Malayalam film and who would qualify as a Malayali.

The pre-production phase of this film had its genesis in its director, Kamal's, futile efforts to find the lost print and negative of *Vikatakumaran*, and to track down someone who had seen the film. With the films discussed here so far, we have referents upon which the storyline can constantly draw; Rosy's story, however, is marked by a complicated *absence* of any such. How would one trace the life of Rosy when she lived in anonymity after her debut, not leaving any traces, even in photographs? These questions drive the narrative of *Celluloid* and were the core engine of its pre-production machinery as well. The film's script, in fact, is based on Vinu Abraham's 2008 novel, *Nashtanaayika*, a speculative, fictional account of what might have happened to Rosy – but speculation is all that remains. Indeed, her story, and those of J.C. Daniel and *Vikatakumaran*, would otherwise have been consigned to oblivion but for the determined efforts of Chelangatt Gopalakrishnan, a film historian specialising in early cinema, who crusaded to bring to notice the government's apathy and mindless inaction towards Daniel's plea and the orchestrated silence around what was the first Malayalam film. After decades of effort, a nod of acknowledgement for *Vikatakumaran* finally came, with the Kerala state government attempting amends by instituting the previously mentioned lifetime achievement award in Daniel's name in 1992.

It is between the 'losses' of these two figures of Malayalam film history that another important figure emerges – that of the 'creative film historian'. In fact, this appears as a recurrent trope in all four films here discussed, not just *Celluloid*, wherein the use of the 'film-within-a-film' format and the figure of the 'film historian' together reassemble the film medium to trigger dormant memories. If, as Derrida says, "the future belongs to ghosts", then the past possesses the present. These films are indeed instances of historical exorcism through narrative, and the creative film historian appears, in our analysis, as the medium via which this act of chronological transcendence manifests.

Tracking 'Lost Narratives': The Creative Film Historian as Exorcist

In these films, the figure of the creative film historian becomes proactive in unearthing lost threads once thought 'irretrievable'. With a deft handling of past and present, and a selective deployment of strands from both, even to the point of speculatively working his way out, the 'creative film historian' acts as a facilitator to salvage and re-project the lost fragmentary archives to the present. By flaking off the 'dead skin' of the past, he penetrates to the flesh of an earlier temporality and reinstates the impulse to retrieve the connection between two moments separated in time. Individual recollections here evoke forgotten moments which then get re-crafted into cultural scripts or templates. Here film as a medium itself acts as a 'time machine', retrieving fragments from the past to build an alternative archive. Such an archive can withstand the demands of 'factual' appropriateness and logical coherence and bring to light the contradictory impulses it contains. This template of 'loss' (lost narratives, figures, objects) and 'search' (for the long tradition of Malayalam cinema) seems to be a strong influence, governing both the diegetic and extra-diegetic worlds of these films. It seems as if these films push for the need to place Malayalam cinema as an 'organic entity' which has 'matured' long enough to be nostalgic about its own past. Just like a clock that suddenly begins to tick after months of hanging silent on the wall, the past comes gushing in, validating a "persistence of a present past" (Derrida and Stiegler 1996) as the historian retrieves the lost data from the contingencies of life.

Celluloid does not limit its concerns to J.C. Daniel and Rosy, but uses their story as a peg to trace the trajectory of Malayalam cinema to the early 2000s. Chelangatt Gopalakrishnan's quest for the lost history of *Vikatakumaran* becomes the backdrop for the narrative to explore the journey Malayalam cinema underwent from the 1930s onwards. It was Gopalakrishnan who was instrumental in *Vikatakumaran* being recognised as the first Malayalam film, an argument he advanced in his biography of Daniel, *J.C. Daniel in the Jeevithakatha* (*The life story of J.C. Daniel*). His claims were at first heavily contested; *Balan* (1938), the first Malayalam talkie, was previously held to be the originary point for Malayalam film history, as per the dominant accounts on cinema. The appearance of Chelangatt Gopalakrishnan as a fictive character in *Celluloid* is an instance carefully calibrated to accommodate the seepage of present into past. While Malayalam cinema is projected to be reckoning with such an influx in productive ways, the production of *Celluloid* is shown as an instance which carries the spirit of such an endeavour. Another instance of such a move is presented towards the end of the film when we see simulated shots of the documentary filmmaker R. Gopalakrishnan (in real life, the maker of an award-winning film on the life of J.C. Daniel) being facilitated in the presence of past and present directors and producers. Both R. Gopalakrishnan and the ensemble audience are played by their real-life personas. In our analysis, this ensemble is created in order to illustrate how far Malayalam cinema has moved from Daniel's disrupted exhibition at the Capitol theatre.

In the film, Chelangatt Gopalakrishnan becomes the 'creative historian' invested with the task of conjuring apparitions from the past to enter the present. Unlike the fictionalising of the narrative seen in *Naayika* and *Thirakatha*, the use of the referent figure in *Celluloid* is distinct. This is primarily because Chelangatt's association with the 'lost film' (*Vikatakumaran*) in real life was a fairly well-known fact, and the narrative mobilises this to move beyond the *fictionalising of real events*, on which the other two films rely heavily. Even as this becomes striking, it somewhere blunts the radical potential wielded by the figure of the creative historian, who here is forcefully asked to become an alibi for 'authenticity' and 'facticity'. Promoted as Kamal's offering to Malayalam cinema in his silver jubilee year as a film director, it successfully withstands the temptations of being clubbed into a period film, all the while doubling up as a peep-hole to take a glance at the present moment.



Vellaripravinte Changathi, the last film that we focus on, brings to light the 1960s film era through the *lost reel* of a fictional unreleased film (also the title of the film) retrieved by, the ‘creative historian’ Manikunju from the isolated quarters of the Chennai-based Gemini Lab, which houses old film reels that are yet to be destroyed. It is telling that this quarter of the Lab is informally referred to as the *pretalayam* or ‘ghost house’. Therefore, in discovering the lost film reel, what is recovered is not just ‘celluloid’. Rather, alongside it, the muffled voices and unrealised dreams of those who were part of the production of the film are also exorcised from the deep caverns of amnesia and anonymity. As Manikunju watches the unreleased film (made by his father, Augustine Joseph) in the preview theatre, one among the many reels in the *ghost house* waiting to be re-called back to life, he embarks on a journey to find the film’s lead cast who enacted the roles of Ravi and Sulekha, lovers doomed to separation. As in the other three films, real life incidents become part of the film narrative here as well. Ravi’s broad daylight murder of Sulekha, a sensational case which took place in Calicut in the 1970s, is woven into the narrative of the film-within-the-film quite dexterously. The shot of Ravi holding Sulekha’s lifeless body and weeping helplessly is an image mobilised to conjoin the past with the present moments. There is a redemptive potential inherent in the discovery of the lost reel as the final shot of the film shows Shajahan and Mary Varghese (in the lost film, the actors who play Ravi and Sulekha, enacted in real life by Dileep and Kavya Madhavan) brought together after years of separation. Here the present is mobilised into the narrative as an uninvited guest whose entry is so stark that it cannot be missed. The contemporary moment becomes the ghost that watches us, someone by whom we feel ourselves being observed or surveyed.

Publicity poster for *Vellaripravinte Changathi* with actor Indrajit, seen in the background handling film reel. Indrajit plays the role of Manikunju in the film – the character that retrieves the fictitious lost film of the title

Aleena's unfinished project on the 'lost heroines' of Malayalam cinema in *Naayika* is a trace which haunts our writing as well. This project is intended as a creative exercise to look at what happens when the present slips into a historical past. Does it also bring one to revisit the crystallised memory, where remnants of what has been forcefully weeded away could return? Memory seems to be in a state of permanent evolution. Even while it is unconscious of its successive deformation and is vulnerable to manipulations and appropriations, it is also susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. It thus nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic. Maybe the search for the lost heroine, *nashtanaayika*, is caught somewhere in between. ■

Notes

- 1 See "Ranjith Finally Confesses the Truth", in **One India Entertainment**, 9 September 2008. Available at: <http://entertainment.oneindia.in/malayalam/news/2008/thirakkatha-ranjith-controversy-190908.html> (last accessed 16 November 2012).
- 2 See "Thirakkatha: Some Questions" (2008). Available at: <http://srijithv.com/blog/thirakkatha> (last accessed 12 September 2012).
- 3 See <http://oldmalayalamcinema.wordpress.com/> (last accessed 13 September 2012).
- 4 See Saraswathy Nagarajan, "Writing Change", **The Hindu**, 17 December 2010. Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/arts/cinema/article958726.ece> (last accessed 13 October 2012). Also, "Urvashi Sarada is Back as Naayika", **Rediff Movies**, 28 June 2011. Available at: <http://www.rediff.com/movies/report/urvashi-sarada-is-back-as-naayika/20110628.htm> (last accessed 15 October 2011).
- 5 Bindu Menon's work on Rosy's life also looks back at the disappeared heroine and is one of the few attempts at retrieving the lost narrative of Rosy. "Chronicles of a Disappearance: P.K. Rosy and Contemporary Malayalam Cinema". Paper presented at ASA conference held at JNU in 2012. <http://www.nomadit.co.uk/asa/asa2012/panels.php5?PanelID=1203> (last accessed 13 September 2012).

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<http://wallpapers.oneindia.in/d/341419-2/vellapravinte-changaathi-04.jpg>



ERROR | GLITCH | NOISE**OBSERVATIONS ON AESTHETIC FORMS OF FAILURE****Charu Maithani****Introduction**

We see the world through different forms of projections – cinema, digital, print and also nature (extending Feuerbach's notion of God being the outward projection of human nature). Characterising the post-modern shift in space-time, computer programs as digital projections have added virtuality in the space-time consortium, transforming its perception. The scope of sharing videos, images, information and knowledge digitally has changed our understanding of the medium and outreach, contributing to the culture and ecology of distribution and communication. Simultaneously, the gap between mediated experience and reality is becoming difficult to identify. Mnemonic images from mediated experiences create a better experience, many times leaving us disappointed with actuality. At such an intersection, an error in the medium intervenes with instability, mistake and inaccuracy.

Making use of the scope of error in the transfer of information or data, a glitch confronts us with new possibilities and dimensions. Rendering a safe system ineffective, the error advocates the simultaneous provocation and expansion of a medium. The error annotates the space-time of an event with a mark that disrupts the (perceived) expected flow, instilling doubt and fear of instability. A closer look to the poetics of error gives an insight into the medium's possibilities and propels the development of knowledge.

Through this article, I propose to look at the variety, nature and aesthetics of error in forms of the earlier experiments in cinema – flicker films, expanded cinema – to the current forms of glitch art and hacktivism, while exploring the different meanings of glitch, error, interruption, noise, failure and accident in both technical and social senses. While looking at the metaphorical and cultural dimensions of glitch, the article concludes with some thoughts on the future possibilities of glitch.

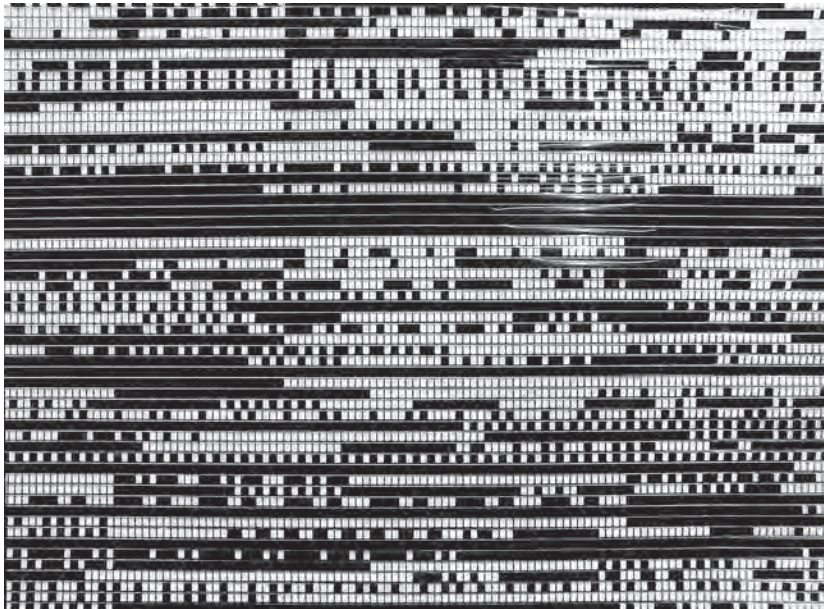
Types of Failure¹

**Accident : : Mistake : : Weakness : : Inability : : Incorrect Method : : Uselessness :
: Incompatibility : : Embarrassment : : Confusion : : Redundancy : : Obsolescence
: : Incoherence : : Unrecognisability : : Absurdity : : Invisibility : : Impermanence : :
Decay : : Instability : : Forgetability : : Tardiness : : Disappearance : : Catastrophe :
: Uncertainty : : Doubt : : Fear : : Distractability**

Flicker Films

The experimental film sub-genre, flicker films, illuminates the existence of a single frame. Bringing forth the gap between, flicker films simulate error in film projection. By inverting the phenomenon of viewing 24 frames per second, the fluttering films confront the viewer with possibilities of error in film projection. In Peter Kubelka's *Arnulf Rainer*, rhythmic alternations between blank and white frames are like flashes of memory. Traces of each frame can be found in the next, as the sounds are interrupted with silences. The idea of movement is created with the next frame, many times giving a stroboscopic effect. Paul Sharits and Tony Conrad are others who use flicker as an aesthetic tool in their films. The black frames and interrupted sound make way for a *gap* in the audio and visual. The flicker and gap between each frame is the error.

Taking us back to the basics of cinema, flicker films challenge the idea of gap, movement and silence, bringing to light thoughts and images that we otherwise won't see. Michael Arnold's films – like *Pièce Touchée* and *ALONE. Life Wastes Andy Hardy* – evolve from flicker films. His films analyse other films by slowing them down frame by frame; slowing motion; repeating, reversing and embedding flicker. Stretching time in all of his work, his films confront unobvious and suppressed tensions. The otherwise conceivable error confronts the viewer as a tool to announce the cryptic.



Arnulf Rainer,
Peter Kubelka, 1960
Installation with the entire
reel of the film laid out

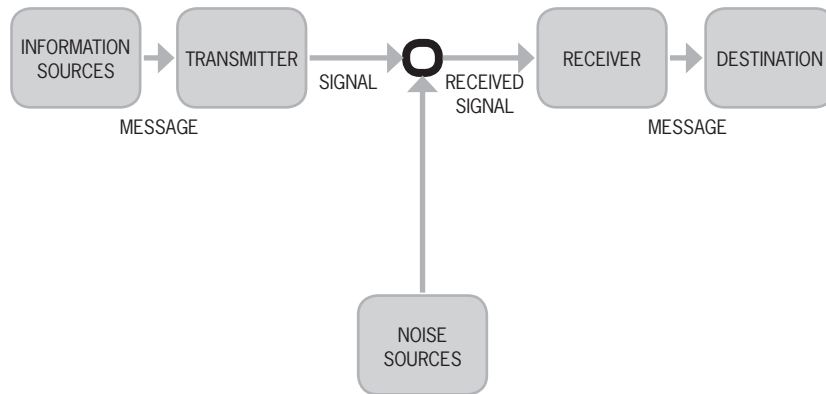
Communication

A Mathematical Theory of Communication by mathematician Claude E. Shannon is an article written in 1948 that lays foundation to information and communication theory and the field of cybernetics. Also known as the Father of the Digital Age, Shannon's paper was path-breaking. A few observations on the communication model:

- i. It is mathematically impossible to get an error-free communication.
- ii. The medium is just a tool to get the message across.
- iii. The capacity of a channel to transmit information is called the Shannon limit.

Theoretically, it is possible to transmit information below the Shannon limit with zero error, if a channel's capacity to transmit information is greater than the rate at which information is being transmitted.

- iv. Data compression through source coding is based on the objective of removing redundancy and repetition in a message.
- v. The signal received can be understood only if the decoding tool or software understands the encoding.
- vi. The diagram depicts the relationship between information, power and noise in cybernetics. Information is directed towards a desired output. By inducing noise, the flow of information can change the output.



Communication Model, Claude E Shannon, 1948

In *Post-digital Aesthetics*, Lev Manovich talks about a model for cultural communication; he highlights the importance of the medium (channel), adding the component of the author's and reader's respective software² in the post-digital communication model. The communication model can now be considered as

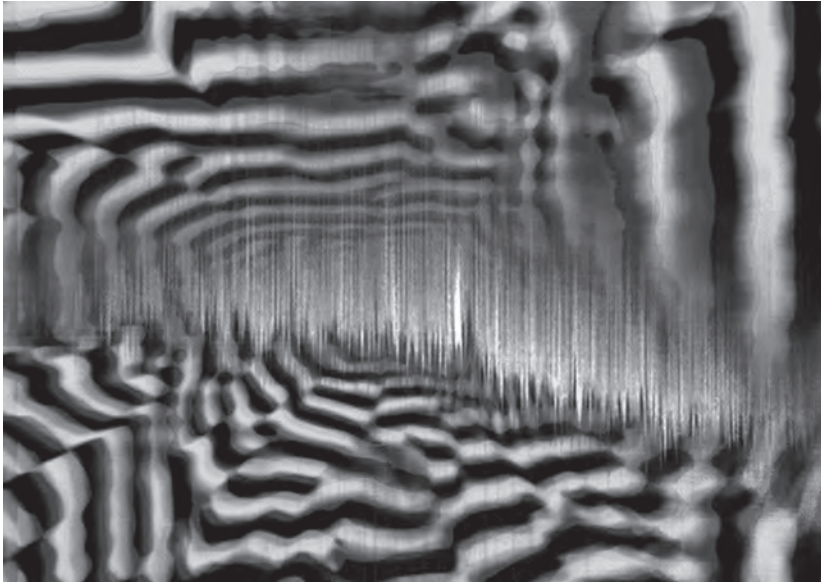
Sender – Software – Message – Software – Message – Receiver

Hamartia

Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, talks about *hamartia*, meaning flaw, mistake, error, failure or, as the New Testament has it, sin. In literature, it denotes the hero's tragic flaw, a misjudgement. T.C.W. Stinton discusses the interpretation of *hamartia* as a moral flaw in *Hamartia in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*. Stinton groups the meanings of *hamartia* into three: to miss the mark (literally); to fail in some object or make a mistake; and to offend morally or do wrong.³

An inherent flaw or misjudgement is manipulated to get the figure of a 'tragic hero'. Hamlet's indecisiveness and Othello's jealousy led to their downfall. While philosophers and literarians can debate over the ethical, moral and intellectual meanings of the word, it certainly represents error. An error in or by a person so grave that it leaves them exposed to the most tragic ends of our times.

"To err is human and to glitch is machine".⁴



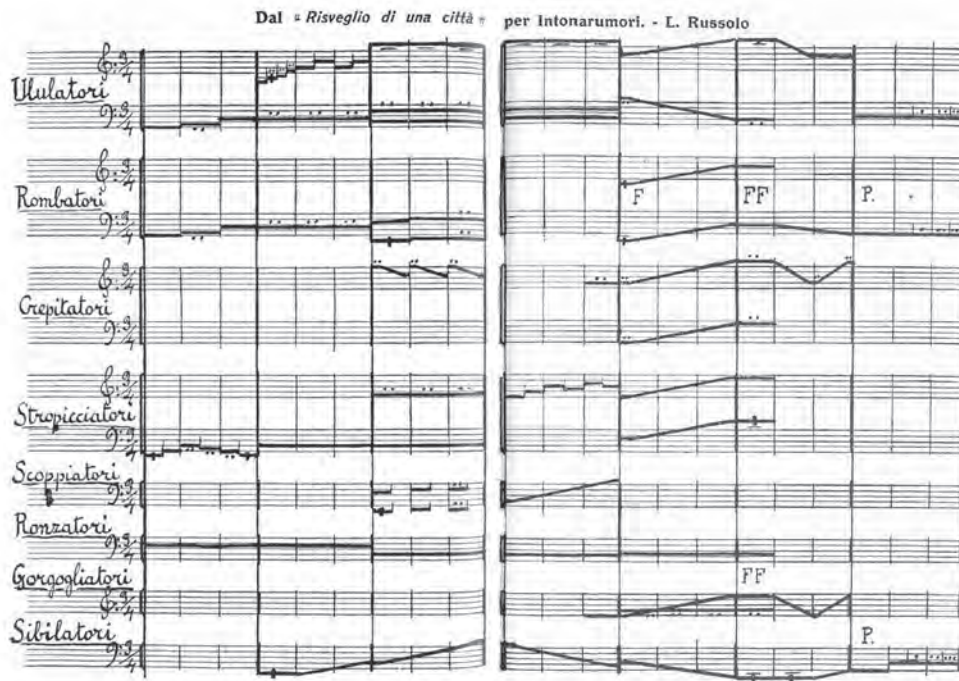
If you ask me how I feel today,
Rosa Menkman, 2012

Conclusions from *The Art of Noise (futurist manifesto, 1913)* by Luigi Russolo⁵

1. We must more and more enlarge and enrich the domain of musical sounds. Our sensibility requires it. In fact, it can be noticed that all contemporary composers of genius tend to stress the most complex dissonances. Moving away from pure sound, they nearly reach noise-sound. This need and this tendency can be totally realised only through the joining and substituting of noises to and for musical sounds.
2. We must replace the limited variety of timbres of orchestral instruments by the infinite variety of timbres of noises obtained through special mechanisms.
3. The musician's sensibility, once he is rid of facile, traditional rhythms, will find in the domain of noises the means of development and renewal, an easy task since each noise offers us the union of the most diverse rhythms as well as its dominant ones.
4. Each noise possesses among its irregular vibrations a predominant basic pitch. This will make it easy to obtain, while building instruments meant to produce this sound, a very wide variety of pitches, half-pitches and quarter-pitches. This variety of pitches will not deprive each noise of its characteristic timbre but will, rather, increase its range.
5. The technical difficulties presented by the construction of these instruments are not grave. As soon as we will have found the mechanical principle which produces a certain noise, we will be able to graduate its pitch according to the laws of acoustics. For instance, if the instrument employs a rotating movement, we will speed it up or slow it down. When not dealing with a rotating instrument, we will increase or decrease the size or the tension of the sound-making parts.
6. This new orchestra will produce the newest, most complex sonic emotions, not through a succession of imitative noises reproducing life, but rather through a fantastic association of these varied sounds. For this reason, every instrument must

make possible the changing of pitches through a built-in, larger or smaller resonator or other extension.

7. The variety of noises is infinite. We certainly possess nowadays over a thousand different machines, between whose thousand different noises, we can distinguish. With the endless multiplication of machinery, one day we will be able to make ten, twenty or thirty thousand different noises. We will not have to imitate these noises but rather combine them according to our artistic fantasy.
8. We invite all truly gifted and bold young musicians to analyse all noises so as to understand their different composing rhythms, their main and secondary pitches. Comparing these noise sounds to other sounds, they will realise how the latter are more varied than the former. Thus will the comprehension, taste and passion for noises be developed. Our expanded sensibility will gain futurist ears as it already has futurist eyes. In a few years, the engines of our industrial cities will be skilfully tuned, so that every factory is turned into an intoxicating orchestra of noises.



Intonarumori, Luigi Russolo, 1914

Luigi Russolo built Intonarumori to produce sounds of machines. By composing pieces for the intonarumori, Russolo also develops a new, graphic form of musical score. In 1914, the first concert for 18 intonarumori, a work divided into eight different categories of sounds, caused a huge scandal in Milan. In 1914, the 12 concerts staged in London drew more positive reactions. After the First World War, concerts for intonarumori were staged together with classical symphony orchestras.

Biohacking

In *The Hackers' Code of Ethics*, Steven Levy talks about computer access, freedom of information and decentralisation of authority.⁶ By manipulating faults and changing the use and function of obsolete technology, hackers are able to use the system for their purposes. Building upon existing systems and ideas, hackers expand the capability and understanding of technology.

A new form of hacking gaining interest is biohacking. In an interview to Steven Levy in *Wired*, Bill Gates says that if he were a teenager today, he'd be hacking biology.⁷ Biohacking uses biology to change gene sequencing, effect body augmentation through machines and adjust biological processes in the body through chemical methods. Mainly working away from institutions and organisations, most biopunks are DIY scientists, sometimes using their own body to hack. Dave Asprey has upgraded his body to be more efficient through chemicals and surgeries on himself. Implanting machines in her body, Lepht Anonym is a biohacker of another kind. She uses instruments from the kitchen to implant different kinds of technology in her body for the purpose of sensory extension. In a video on YouTube,⁸ Lepht talks about her main reason for it – curiosity.

Based on hacking ethics, biohacking is encouraged, shared and passed on to people who are willing to try it. Many times, it is difficult to pin point whether biohackers exploit the faults or manipulate the properties of the biological system to achieve their goals. Many times, it's both.

Concluding Thoughts

Error or glitch is a break providing a space on which various expressions can be projected. As seen above in various forms of error, glitch and noise, failure confronts the medium with its limitations. It deconstructs the systems of power and control behind the medium by exposing its gaps and faults.

Any system inherently contains a chance of error. That chance is generated into an evolutionary quality that needs to be grasped. *Glitch Studies Manifesto* by Rosa Menkman talks about how the constant search for complete transparency brings newer, better media. Every one of these new and improved technologies will always have their own fingerprints of imperfection.⁹

Using error and glitch as generative tools in visual and sonic art practice is increasingly becoming part of the art-making process. Many websites and projects are exploring glitch aesthetics. Rosa Menkman's website, <http://rosa-menkman.blogspot.in/>, Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans' (Jodi)'s website and works, <http://www.jodi.org/>, Dimitre Lima and Iman Moradi's now defunct *Glitch Browser*, <http://dmtr.org/glitchbrowser/>, are just a few examples. One can even create your own set of glitch-y images at the *ImageGlitcher*, <http://www.airtightinteractive.com/demos/js/imageglitcher/>. Glitch aesthetics lends itself to a wide variety of manipulation and use. Iman Moradi in his 2004 dissertation on glitch art compares *pure glitch* and *glitch alike*, delving further into glitch creation. Similar differentiations between unexpected and designed glitch were also explored in Menkman's essay, *The Glitch Momentum*, where she borrows Marshal McLuhan's concept and introduces hot and cool glitch. An error that happens unexpectedly is a cool or pure glitch, unlike an error that has been induced through design and control, called hot glitch or glitch alike. Many consider the latter as just a filter or preset that has become a new commodity made popular as an 'effect'.¹⁰ It is no surprise that in visual effects history, a lot of effects were initially errors.

The unexpected nature of glitch makes the encounter with error very special. The error makes other ways of seeing not only possible, but necessary. The event created out of this encounter invents a space-time arrangement that leads to a re-evaluation of existing values.

The virtuality added in the encounter is through the medium, as it is the capability of the medium to produce the error. The quality of the encounter depends upon the medium that is the interface between the error and the audience. The event then “is not the solution to a problem, but rather opens up what is possible”¹¹ beyond the medium. Bruce Sterling’s new aesthetics, biopunk and transhumanism are a part of these emerging possibilities. ■

Notes

- 1 “Institute of Failure”, www.institute-of-failure.com (last accessed 19 February 2013).
- 2 Lev Manovich. “Post-digital Aesthetics”, p. 15. Available at: <http://www.alice.id.tue.nl/references/manovich-2005.pdf> (last accessed 17 February 2013).
- 3 T.C.W. Stinton. “Hamartia in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy”. In **The Classical Quarterly** 25 n.s. (2), pp. 221-254 (December 1975). Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/638320> (last accessed 17 February 2018).
- 4 Phillip Stearns. “Error, Noise, Glitch – The Art of the Algorithmic Unconscious”. In ‘DeFuncT/ReFuncT’ catalogue.
- 5 Luigi Russolo (1913). **The Art of Noise: Futurist Manifesto**, (trans.) Robert Filliou (Great Bear Pamphlet, Something Else Press, 1967, New York), pp. 11-12.
- 6 Steven Levy. **Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution** (Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984, New York), p. 458.
- 7 Steven Levy. “Geek Power: Steven Levy Revisits Tech Titans, Hackers, Idealists”. In **Wired**, 19 April 2012. Available at: http://www.wired.com/magazine/2010/04/ff_hackers/all/1 (last accessed 17 February 2013).
- 8 In the video, Lepht Anonym is talking at the 27th Chaos Communication Congress in Berlin, December 2010. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-Dv6dDtdcs> (last accessed 18 February 2013).
- 9 Rosa Menkman. **Glitch Studies Manifesto**. Available at: <http://rosa-menkman.blogspot.in/2010/02/glitch-studies-manifesto.html> (last accessed 18 February 2013).
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Maurizio Lazzarato. “Struggle, Event, Media”. In (eds.) Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl, **The Green Room: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art – I** (Sternberg Press and Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, 2008, New York), pp. 213-214.

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ENHANCEMENT OR DISTORTION?

FROM THE CLAUDE GLASS TO INSTAGRAM

Robert Willim

In my eyes, and I imagine in the eyes of any photographer, artist or designer worth their salt, anyone posting a fake DOF [Depth of Field] Instagram photo looks like a poor, tasteless fool who needs to be shown the error of their ways. And unfortunately for the rest of us, they are so proud of their creations (of which they actually had no creative input besides pointing, clicking, and selecting a filter from a list), that they want to show them to the world at every possible opportunity. Hence the amount of irrelevant and inane photos on any social media site is now growing exponentially. Thankfully however, with the average short life-span of online fads, Instagram will most likely be forgotten and overshadowed by something equally horrendous in the next six months.

Escapetone 2012

It is easy to lower the tone of the picture by washing it over with gray or brown; and easy to see the effect of the landscape, when its colors are thus universally polluted with black, by using the black convex mirror, one of the most pestilent inventions for falsifying Nature and degrading art which was ever put into an artist's hand.

John Ruskin, quoted in Dupré 2005:28

The two quotes above were taken from texts separated by around 150 years. In both quotes, the authors dissociate themselves from relatively widely-used imaging technologies. The first rant was written on a blog administrated by a small design studio located in Boston. The criticised technologies were applications like Instagram, Hipstamatic, Snapseed, etc., which around 2010 gave users of smartphones, like the iPhone, the potential to swiftly apply preset filters and effects

to their photos. The second text was written by the art critic and thinker, John Ruskin, in the 19th century. The technology he disdained was the Lorrain mirror (also called the Black mirror). The tinted mirror was used by artists and tourists to frame and visually represent landscape motifs according to picturesque aesthetic ideals. The Lorrain mirror is related to another device called the Claude glass, which was a small looking-glass that came in different colours.

The quotes represent broader debates and currents related to imaging technologies and mediation. I will use the quotes and the currents they represent as points of departure to primarily discuss practices of mediation. In the discussion, I will enlase a genealogical account of landscape representation, in which the word 'picturesque' will be important. The main point with this essay is to scrutinise the ways that visual media in some different historical contexts have been associated with either enhancement or distortion.

Instagram Aesthetics

Instagram was launched in October 2010. Central to the concept, with its instant, one-click filtering of photos, was the inclusion in a larger web of image sociality, where users could upload, share and comment on photos. The app, accompanied by the marketing pitch, "Fast, beautiful photosharing for your iPhone", was an imaging tool combined with a web-based social network. One of the founders, Kevin Systrom, stated that

The idea was to make mobile photography fast, beautiful and fun. We learned from experience that taking photos on the phone didn't lead to the results that we wanted, so we created the filters and tools to achieve a more artistic experience (Systrom, quoted in Richmond 2011).

At the end of 2011, Instagram had almost 15 million users, sharing hundreds of millions of photos (Keath 2011; Van Grove 2011). The numbers kept growing. In early 2012, Facebook acquired Instagram for \$1 billion (Rusli 2012). The filtering aesthetics so characteristic to Instagram were applied in other services. The photo editor, Snapseed, featuring a number of filters, was acquired by Google in 2012, and later the same year, Twitter included a number of photo filters in its interface, filters with names such as 'vintage' and 'gritty'.

Apps, services and products offering communications through social networks and digitally mediated sociality came in many guises. Several featured filtering effects for images. At the time Instagram was bought by Facebook, a product called Viddy was recognised as a budding 'Instagram for Video'. On the company's blog, it was stated that: "Viddy is a simple way for anyone to capture, beautify, and share amazing videos with the world". Filters similar to the ones that many users appreciated when using Instagram could now easily be applied to moving images. In the early 21st century, the visual aesthetics of filtering effects characterised by saturated colours or pale, washed-out imagery prevailed among millions of users in the social networks.

Through the Filter

Applications and tools like Instagram and the Lorrain mirror or the Claude glass were based on their abilities to transform and filter images or views. A filter (or digital effect) is a device for transformation and mediation. The digital apps were explicitly based on effects called filters that users could apply. Many of these offered transformations that either emulated the looks from earlier analog, lo-fi or toy cameras, like the Russian LOMO or the Chinese Holga.

What used to be a quirky side-effect of cheap toy cameras, the so-called 'lo-fi' look, has become increasingly fashionable among digital photographers in the past couple of years. Amongst other things, 'lo-fi' images are characterised by over- or under- exposure, distortion, intense grain and low colour fidelity. Traditionally, in film cameras, these traits were caused by inexpensive plastic lenses, light leakage and colour and exposure changes created by creative or inexpert film processing (Smith 2011).

Some of the criticism against apps emulating lo-fi aesthetics and vintage looks were based on the argument that the filters distort and ruin the visual representation (Shankland 2011). The argument can be related to the complex issue of truthfulness and the realism of visual representation (cf. Crary 1992; Kemp 2006). It can also be related to questions on immediacy and the dreams of transparent media (Bolter and Grusin 2000).

Lorrain mirrors and Claude glasses were used mostly before the 20th century, but some artists were inspired by them in new genres of art, appreciating the filtering and altering effects of tinted glass. During the 20th century, artists like Gerhard Richter and François Perrodin made works with tinted glasses and mirrors, experimenting with the progressive loss of the image, devaluation and abstraction (Maillet 2004:187ff.). Some decades later, Matts Leiderstam used Claude glasses in his artistic examinations of landscape interpretation and seeing (Leiderstam 2006).

Filtering might distort perceptions and images, but often this distortion is the very aim of a work (Krapp 2011; cf. Boym). Applications of distortion are related to creative appreciations of noise, which might be seen as a comment on the quest for truthful mediated representations throughout history. Various noise-cancelling technologies have been developed in order to get rid of unwanted interference and distortion. But when is a visual effect experienced and defined as noise? Within photography, filters have been used to reduce or transform the visual input in cameras to create pictures with various qualities. Filters for colour correction, contrast enhancement, polarisation or various effects affect the image. To some extent, filters may reduce what is considered noise. But there is no clear-cut limit to define when a filter turns from being a noise reducer to an inducer of effects that might very well be experienced as noise. This ambiguity of filters often becomes a hot topic when new technologies or media are introduced to users, something that the quotes at the beginning of the essay illustrate.

Out in the Landscape

There have been extensive theoretical discussions and accounts around how to conceive landscapes within the social and cultural sciences and the arts (see Wylie 2007; DeLue and Elkins 2008; Ingold 2011). Landscape is often related to the concept 'environment', and consequently to 'ecology' and 'nature'. The question is of whether we can thoroughly understand the notion of landscape without scrutinising the uses and understandings of these concepts (Morton 2007; Thornes 2008). However, I haven't the space here to delve deeper into this dense conceptual and theoretical 'landscape' or 'ecology' (sorry for the pun) – I will stick mainly to the scopic notion of landscape, not because I find it analytically the best understanding of the concept at large, but because this notion is of most relevance to the discussion here.

The word 'landscape' can be etymologically traced to mediaeval descriptions of agrarian areas closely associated with the everyday practices of farmer communities. 'Landscape' was land shaped by human activities (Ingold 2011). During the 16th century, the word became linked to Dutch landscape painting, a tie that has strongly formed subsequent uses of the word. Landscape is since then often associated with painterly depiction and scopic practices.

The equation of the shape of the land with its look – of the *scaped* with the *scopic* – has become firmly lodged in the vocabulary of modernist art history. Landscape has thus come to be identified with scenery and with an art of description that would see the world spread out on canvas, much as in the subsequent development of both cartography and photography, it would come to be projected onto a plate or a screen, or the pages of an atlas (Ingold 2011:126f., italics in original).

In this sense, landscapes connote a distance, a subject-object relation where panoramic framings of wide expanses

can be turned into views by an onlooker. According to this understanding, landscapes are entities at a distance that can be enjoyed from a standpoint, preferably from a scenic overview. This notion makes landscape something you as an observer, artist or tourist can go out in. You are in the landscape but still looking at it. You come close, but it is still somewhat at a distance.

Picturesque Views

The scopic practices of the scenic overview have a chequered cultural history in Europe and North America. The enjoyment of landscape views has long been practiced. But during the 17th century, and after, notions of landscape and nature became charged with new values in Europe. The concepts became integrated in artistic practices and in gardening and architecture in novel ways. The landscape concept also became central for the growth of a new set of practices in the form of tourism.

Ideas about authentic experiences and representations are crucial for the understanding of both art and tourism. A concept that was applied in art and subsequently in tourism was the picturesque. To approach the world as if it were a picture first appeared in practices of painting and was then adopted in gardening as well as in tourism, but, since the 19th century, has been associated to a high degree with paltry aesthetic qualities and bad taste. John Macarthur writes about these shifting understandings when he scrutinises the history of the picturesque and how it has been related to notions of architecture, disgust and irregularities.

Today, understanding experience through images is ubiquitous, and its accompanying technology so sophisticated that the term 'picturesque', which once meant a radical blurring of art and life, is frequently used as a synonym for aesthetic failure, trivial cultural products and naïve tastes (Macarthur 2007:1).

This shift can be related to a cultural dynamic of which Orvar Löfgren writes in his history of vacationing. He stresses that the world of tourism is characterised by "the tension between routinization and improvisation, between the predictable and the surprising, which produces a craving for fresh sights and novel experiences" (Löfgren 1999:26f.). The picturesque was a quality that was articulated in various ways. Macarthur stresses the understanding of "the picturesque as an ensemble of concepts and techniques" (Macarthur 2007:2). In relation to tourism and artistic practices in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries, it was promoted in different ways in different national contexts. But there were also similarities in how it was articulated among a growing cadre of cosmopolitan, new elite tourists (Löfgren 1999:21). This early tourism was very much about establishing norms and genres of representation (*ibid.*:26).

Learning the picturesque thus meant being able to locate landscapes with special qualities – it was the interplay of certain elements, shadow and light, foliage, irregular and varied landscape features that made a truly picturesque view. The picturesque motif often carried an air of nostalgia, epitomized in the idyllic rural life. Signs of decay, an old cottage, a ruin, a tombstone further stressed this atmosphere. Melancholy laments over the passing of time, as well as the insignificance of human beings became important parts of the picturesque sensibility (*ibid.*:20f).

The picturesque became part of a quite heterogeneous landscape aesthetic, but there are some recurring themes. When reading about 18th century tourists, the French-born painter Claude Lorrain often appears in the texts. He was active during the 17th century and was famous for his tranquil landscape motifs from the Italian countryside outside Rome.

The visual features of Lorrain's paintings, especially his treatments of light, became an aesthetic ideal among tourists and artists searching for the picturesque.

In order to charge experiences of landscape with aesthetic qualities reminiscent of Lorrain's paintings, tourists and painters started using optic devices called Claude glasses or Lorrain mirrors. This was the kind of device that John Ruskin criticised in the quote at the introduction of this text.

The devices came in a number of variations based on two major types. The first, the Lorrain mirror, was a slightly convex, tinted mirror. The other, the Claude glass, was a framed, transparent, coloured glass. By using glasses with various shades, shifting emotional registers or temporal variations could be evoked. A brownish tone could call forth a warm and mellow atmosphere, while a bluish glass could be associated with a nightly moonlit vista and so on. The conceptual similarities to some digital filters available centuries later are striking.

Through Glasses and Screens

We can today spot differences between the ways that different users have been approaching technologies like Instagram. Some are utterly negative towards these apps and devices; others find them funny to play around with; others consciously use them in creative practices, sometimes parallel with uses among photographers of more quality- and credibility-controlled equipment. Similar practices occurred in relation to Claude glasses and the picturesque (Löfgren 1999:27). The uses of media (new or old) might become part of routinised uses, but that doesn't mean that these are automatised and thoughtless practices. The use of newer filtering applications, as well as earlier uses of mirrors and glasses, is not the mechanical adoption of a technology. While many artists and tourists embraced the qualities of devices like the Claude glass, others despised them, and used "the derogatory label of Claudianism" (*ibid.*).

John Ruskin, who during the 19th century wrote extensively on art and architecture, was, as we have seen, explicitly critical of the Lorrain mirror. According to Macarthur, Ruskin advocated a kind of picturesque which was based on

... a concept of truth that can govern both moral and aesthetic considerations. He was thus drawn to the empiricism of the picturesque, and as a skilled and trained draughtsman and painter, believed that such truths grew out of artistic practice in the observation of the natural world (Macarthur 2007:14).

Ruskin's ideas about the value of artistic skill and the empiricism of the picturesque is probably one of the reasons why he was one of those who strongly rejected the use of any kind of "filtering effects", like Claude glasses and Lorrain mirrors. According to Ruskin, these devices contributed to "falsifying Nature", ruining and degrading art. Similar thoughts on the ways technologies and media ruin experiences or perceptions of the surrounding world are echoed through subsequent debates on tourism. Löfgren reflects on this:

When the sightseeing bus cruises along we observe the vacation landscape through the smoke-colored Claude-glass of the panorama window. What is new, what is continuity since the days of Mr Plumptre? [James Plumptre was an English clergyman who wrote about his travels in the British Lake district at the end of the 18th century.] What does it mean to appropriate the landscape through the Claude-glass, through the sight of the camcorder, through the car window, or resting on a walking stick? Through intense reading of classical authors, romantic poetry, years of MTV-viewing, or leafing through package tour catalogs? (Löfgren 1999:96).

Today the practices of tourism and art are seldom connected, even if critique against some site-specific art has evoked associations to tourism-like practices (Kwon 2004). Here it might, however, be interesting to blur the borders between the worlds of art and tourism in order to focus on media use and notions of landscape. Ideas about, for example, authenticity are central to both art and tourism, opening up questions like: What equipment is required to get an authentic tourist experience? Or, what does it take to create good art? Which technologies and media are accepted in certain contexts but banned in others? What is a creative tool? When are technologies experienced as intrusive, when do they distort or enhance?

It might be fruitful to further scrutinise these questions and variations of this cultural dynamic, and how it is related to new digital media and technologies. In the cultural analysis of contemporary practices and processes, we can learn from earlier uses of and debates about technologies like the Claude glass and the Lorrain mirror.

Borrowed Features

Let's finally return to the quotes at the beginning of this essay. Why the strong words about "tasteless fools", "pollution" and tools "falsifying Nature and degrading art"? We have touched upon these issues by juxtaposing recent photo apps with tools like the Claude glass and ideas about the picturesque. The feelings expressed in relation to uses of media and imaging devices can also be related to a historically recurring theme of what could be called normative aesthetics. It is part of a defence of craftsmanship and ideas about professionalism. It is part and parcel of the social dynamics that occur when new technologies are introduced in various practices. When electric, then electronic and digital musical instruments were introduced, there were reactions against the loss of musical craftsmanship. Some writers still prefer mechanical typewriters, arguing that computer-based writing is numbing and dumbing. The same goes for imaging

technologies. This might be one attempt at understanding the irritation expressed at the beginning of this essay. But there is more to the story.

New tools encourage and strengthen some practices. New technologies are to some extent often prosthetic (McLuhan 1995). They offer new possibilities; they might enhance the abilities of the user, while they are also numbing or blocking some capacities (a simple example being a note book and calendar that enhance mnemonic practices while simultaneously numbing the memory.) It shifts knowledge in the head to knowledge in the world, as cognitive scientist and design thinker Donald A. Norman would have said (Norman 1998:54:ff.). This shift of knowledge (and skill) can be challenging.

There is a moral undercurrent that seems to run along much of the critique against uses of various technologies. The undercurrent is best illustrated by the fable about 'the bird in borrowed feathers', in which a bird (sometimes a crow or a jay) borrows finery from another species in order to impress. The beautiful bird is, however, revealed to be 'fake' and the borrowed (and sometimes its own) feathers are torn off. This moral stance seems to spur critics when they disdain uses of new technologies as "cheap gains" or as reliance on tools without having any real skill. I feel tempted to slightly tweak the fable to being about borrowed features.

This stance and related suspicions of dilettantism have also been challenged throughout art history in recurring boundary disputes on what is and what is not (good) art. These disputes have occurred in relation to both the Claude glass and the Lorrain mirror as well as to recent software photo filters. Looking at these debates and practices, we can note that the bird seems to have as many friends as enemies.

It is in this field of associations to various shades of skilfulness and dilettantism that the uses of both the Lorrain mirror and Instagram can be positioned. In order to further examine this, we need to know more about how imaging technologies and media are used in specific contexts. In

these examinations, the notions of borrowed features as well as ideas about when media are experienced as enhancing or distorting can be fruitful. ■

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OF CIVICS FICTION AND FICTIONAL CIVICS

Sisir C. Anand

My Inner Orwellian

Why do we restrict which office we vote for? Can't I directly vote for, say, my community postman in a Web 2.0 world, where voting algorithms can be anonymous and cheap? Why aren't children elected to Parliament? Why doesn't the nomenclature 'civil servant' not have the counterpart 'military servant' or 'judicial servant'? These are cute, escapist questions I ask myself when I get hung-over on civic anomie, trying to get in touch with my inner Orwellian. As I navigate the various democracies given to me – by birth and some also through highbrow scavenging – I have wondered whether I am democratic enough or do I merely fantasise about it? Then I ask, more empirically: if democracy means so much to me, why *don't* I fantasise about it? Where are the counterparts to science fictions in the domain of the civics discipline? School children hardly get alternative civics to read for leisure that could combat the wild imaginative powers of their science-oriented peers. Where are the *Popular Civics* magazines and the *Tell Me Why's* of Cabinet and other civic curiosities? What empiricist world records does civics cater to, and what are its unsolved problems? Where are my cutting-ballot civics laboratories?

What's Your Fictionality?

Fictional civics and civics fictions. Let me explain the difference by borrowing from history. Fictional history is akin to alternative history (uchronia), where historical events and contingencies are played with through counterfactual speculations like "What if Gandhi had lived on?" Historical fiction, instead, keeps known historical facts intact, yet fleshes out a wobbly narrative that speculates on undocumented and thus lost facts/possibilities. Stretching this to geography, fictional geographies are imaginary worlds, and geographical fiction is fleshed-up geographic fact. Fictional civics is an alternative civics-verse, while civics fictions are about being creative within the civics we subscribe to. Often the word 'civic' refers to an adjectival form of city, but here I refer to the academic discipline, civics. Futurist civics is gaining with the advent of civic technologies, and we hence need more promising frontier fictions to help find a sublime civic solace.

Neotenic Civics¹

If I were to remember my civics lessons from school, my main recollections would be of a thin textbook whose questions and answers were a crammer's delight, for they involved neither interpretation nor analysis. My civics curriculum gives me only a vomit-worthy feeling of nostalgic repulsion. Civics was mostly about logistics, scant philosophy and diplomacy. There were no civics practicals, no continuous civics assessments and no conspiracy theories. Adolescence didn't leave you with sudden feelings for civics, beyond the knowledge that your license to vote was deferred to age 18, and there were no clear-cut marks on your civic performance. Civic engagement seemed to live and die in debating clubs, but the topics were safe and premeditatedly politically correct. Nobody (given adequate scruples) wanted to replicate the model of politicising the young – wasn't politics an adult domain? Making a child toe a party line was a practice that belonged to China, with its authoritarian outlook. No, India was a place where antagonistic civic outlooks were permitted, even within a family. Most useful 'civics' was sponged up through informal learning. Babyspeak exists in all cultures, to help toddlers pick up their mother tongue. Why is it missing from civics? We need cute civics!

Gone with the Civics Teaser

As a student, I loved the sciences, and detested the social sciences, simply because it was easier to find a hand-me-down book of science brain teasers lying around, mocking me for being too unrefined or too impatient to make much progress with riddles. I proudly terrorised them in return. Today's pedagogic resources are much better, but they still don't boast of a book of social science brain teasers that would keep me civically challenged a while longer. There are compendia of exotic facts, but no workbook that would smugly deride the reader for failing to handle a juicy civics enigma. Finding my civics literacy abysmal and my political awareness boorish, I abstain from voting, believing that, like drunk driving, senseless voting is dangerous.

The problem with the civics curriculum I studied in school is that it has nowhere you can go wrong. There are axioms that are taken at bullet-point value. A great teacher supports these theses with real-world cases. But there is no fantasticism, where civics would foster a rebellion. The grassrootsism of civics pedagogy fails as it is learnt as a series of top-down sketches, meant to seduce power-mongers into a career of *machtpolitik*. There is a failure to exoticise the subject, a lack of an informal or pseudo-civics that captures interest by misdirection. Usual co-curricular activities in civics involve mock elections, but these are very sanitised exercises. Mock elections should have all the paraphernalia of a civic election, including its various shades of token villains, sensitising learners to the need for police action, etc. A mock election with a pedagogic twist is a must. Civics should get under the skin. Enabling an adequately simulated civics world with a mock currency would allow for critical civics insights. We could borrow from basic stereotypes that interest children to recreate the superheroes and supervillains of civics. Since we are moving to a world where multiculturalism is the norm, there is a need to understand kyriarchy, where it should be harder to continue to divide the world into the present dichotomies of oppressor and oppressed. For want of a better phrase, civics needs to expose its licentiousness, and the pursuit of civics must be salacious in metaphor. The most disappointing was the textbooks' lack of a portrayal of civics as something with open-ended challenges. Thus the danger in civics pedagogy is the lack of imaginative crackpot civics.

Form Brahma

One of my earliest inroads into fantasy civics was when I started wondering, as a child, at how bland all the government forms were. Yeesh, what is so lyrical about having a 'birth certificate'

or a 'ballot box'? While searching for some sensual transcendence, I was enraptured by the theological cosmogony of the Indian epics. What if we could have a 'Form Brahma' instead of a birth certificate? I had a civics moment and created a mythological civic world, and later discovered that public relations and propaganda were big at Kurukshetra. In an unknowing way, I was 'branding' civics because to me it was an inhuman mythology. A mentor later demythologised both the epics and the civics for me, pointing out that civics is lacking in the epics, and the epics are lacking in civics. My surrogate imaginary friend told me that I was being unfair to other religions by partaking of a solely Hindu mythology. Form Brahma might be blasphemous as a moniker. I learnt my first lesson in faulty civics when I was alerted to the fact that beyond a few historically named cities, not many rivers or mountains (or other geographic features) in India are named after a non-Hindu heritage. I was dreaming of the unity in diversity that my school text books taught me while understanding the hypocrisy of civics. I was torn between wanting a fantasy to spirit reality, but instead finding within the fantasies such notional prejudices that record the self-censoring civics.

The most disappointing was the textbooks' lack of a portrayal of civics as something with open-ended challenges.

The danger in civics pedagogy is the lack of imaginative crackpot civics.

Thou Shalt Covet Civics

What was the original sin of civics that we would love to eavesdrop on and gossip and euphemise about later? We have always confronted secret histories, secret geographies and even secret economics that instil in us a wonder at these disciplines. What about secret civics? What are the secrets of civics, and what is it about civics that makes it deserve a secret? Do we fail to reverse engineer the civics that works? Is the healthy civics of star countries that top civic indices composed of trade secrets that have been patented away and are too costly to licence? India is less of a country and more of a geographical expression, like the Equator, as Churchill had it. Is India's civics as enviable – why does one size fit all?

Artisanal Civics

In a century of the self, where is the demand for an artisanal civics? What of the civics dreamer who wishes, "I want to live a quarter of my life in a democracy, another quarter in an autocracy, another quarter in an anarchy and another quarter in a plutocracy"? Surely it can't be as hard as changing your gender, the most cosmetic-and-cosmic of surgeries. In a world that portends a cradle-to-grave homage to capitalism, shouldn't all civic diversities be celebrated? What are the axioms of civics, and what do we expect a utopian civics to be? Did our ancestors have innate civic intuitions that we have had the luxury to lose? Or has it been a cyclic game of deduction, induction and abduction?²² Today civics has become more homogenised, a kind of copycat globalised version, bent on reinventing solely the political-correctness wheel that puts our fictioneering to shame. Luckily the world is still multi-polar enough to keep future anthropologists interested. Why do we yearn for a stable civics, reeking

of formalism? Today, there is an opportunity for civics tourism, where you can visit the various political laboratories of the world at their primetime. With the emergence of strategic tourisms like agrotourism, voluntourism, astrotourism, etc. one expects tourist agencies to advertise an itinerary filled with civic delights. Aren't elections a kind of vicarious civics with all their spectacle? Where are the ballot-paper collectors and the election museums that celebrate the notorious artefacts of the civics of stolen elections, or the various follies of Partition? History, geography and economics have a stronger archive. Isn't civics denied curation or are we unskilled in teasing it out? UNESCO should promote a heritage that takes a flattering interest in civics, prospecting more for the outposts of proselytising civics.

Civics by Proxy

One can note how trendy a field is by the buzzwords and neologisms it releases. The art of the 'Machiavellian slip' is as exciting and embarrassing as its Freudian cousin. How lovely that the Eskimos have finely discriminating functional words for various types of snow – yet we don't have words that extrapolate the complexity of our civic experience. Linguists need to spice up our civic commentary with colourful monikers beyond the scandal-'gates'. Metaphors for our social and political experience are visually taken care of by our political cartoonists. Parliament building with its several pillars can be morphed in caricature into a cage, and the tabloids pat themselves on the back. But is that the stuff of enviable fantasies of symbolism and iconography? On the Internet, we find our Robin Hood 2.0s who try to steal civics from those who have too much of it, and attempt to donate it to those who don't. The demographics of inclusivity often suggest that the Internet isn't really as democratic as it pretends. But many revolutionaries often also die in the absentee civics of the net, their dissent quenched by the celebrity-status of netizenism, and we are denied the moments of passionate protests that in our yesteryears gave us our principled radicals who overthrew the corrupted powerful. We could be inspired from various pedagogic memes to cultivate an interest in civics. Think of 99 civic things to do before you die, anyone?

Fiction 1

Here are a few usual semantic expressions that involve history:

/ people whom history has passed by / the urge to undo recent history / homage to historic erasure / without creating false histories / and there can be historical hangovers / as blatant historical forgeries /

Civics is comparatively apologetic and insipid. It fails to be blatant and provocative, even in the spirit of the word. Here are a few better ones:

/ paying homage to his civic and political muses / paradoxical to civic virtue / collapse of civic life only encourages / embarrassed at having broken such an obvious civic code, an act of 'civic carelessness' / treat cities as material homage to civic visions of order / but in its own civic satire it also misses the mark / as a lament over the civilising mission of / nostalgia for the civilising aspects of / paying homage to the civic religion that is climate change / "It is poor civic hygiene to install technologies that could someday facilitate a police state". /

The exercise in metaphor is to replace history with civics³ and see if it semantically tallies. Examples: civic hangovers, civic forgeries. The idea then is to create occasions that give meaning to the new phrases.

Fiction 2

How do we as egalitarians resolve the Kashmir issue? You divide it. But how? Dividing it geographically seems combative because it will then be a scramble for resources. Dividing it historically is impossible because one can't resurrect the original Partition with its Mountbattens. Dividing it economically is dehumanisingly materialistic while proudly utilitarian. Dividing it ethnically, linguistically raises issues of viable civic scale and sovereignty, and promotes dissidence for dissidence's sake.

Maybe you can divide it civically. Invoke a time-sharing contract where Kashmir belongs to Pakistan and India by turns. Probably it would benefit all if the Kashmiris could, like Cinderella, magically turn from Pakistanis to Indians (and vice versa) at every other midnight and enjoy the civic camouflage of it all.⁴ Or wouldn't it, yet?

Fiction 3

1500 hours: Inauguration of X by honourable Y. 1800 hours: Cultural Programme.

Most civic events that invoke the chief-guest-lamp-lighting format – public occasions such as conferences, rallies or inaugurations – have a light cultural event as an accompaniment. Often they want to reflect Indian culture, and they employ artistes from music, dance and drama. What a severe non-secular truncation of Indian culture! Why can't something as energetic as Kabaddi or Kho-Kho be treated as a performance art?

Fiction 4

By the people, of the people, for the people, <insert preposition> the people.

By, of and for. Why did Lincoln settle for these prepositions? Brainwave: let me get my list of prepositions and de/reconstruct. Why would it be useful? Probably in paying homage to it by satire. After all, it is not as if there aren't critics who denounce the Gettysburg Address, howsoever much it has been hailed.

What if we had to alchemise this slogan to lead to new civic gold?

Try, for instance, the ubiquitous board that declares, 'Men at Work', and use it to evoke sensitisation to child labour. Introduce prepositions between 'child' and 'labour', illustrate multiple vantage points and invent a new vanguardism.

Vindicated by Civics

The idea of a fictional civics and civics fictions combo is to provoke controversies that go deeper than civics, so that we are enlightened to the status quo and the brutality of civics as it is. It is time to think of civics as a lifestyle sport if it doesn't feel enchanting enough due to its everydayness. There is so much of a vacuum in the civics of the imagination that our civic arsenal needs upgrading. We have to constantly challenge civics' sacred cows and herald surreal civics lessons. It is hard to find our fictional texts exemplifying civic participation, and we don't take much of a gamble on our civics. We need to overthrow the purely symbolic civic traditions that predominantly indulge in cosmetic civic makeovers (urban beautification), and instead promote a makeover of the civic, where none sacrifices the citizen as mere civic fodder. We need a superficial fictitious civics that deepens discourse by its parapolitical value.⁵ We need to identify our civic black holes and include our civic absurdities in indelible pages of civics. The staples of a civic education should give breathing space to some junk creative civics, the civics that aspires to be merely poetic, so that we are not left at the mercy of the soap opera of civics. Civics pedagogy too is destined for the post-modern scalpel.

In this essay-disguised manifesto, I have attempted to look at how fantasy civics might play a futuristic role in cultivating citizens and salvage them from the dustbins of civics. In the process I have speculated wildly, giving birth to metaphors that I find missing from civics; I

am not done fantasising, but the bottom line is that such fantasies might grip children and the young into a civic fervour – we need a kind of Sherlock Holmes for astute community service. Why is there no whimsicality for the civics in the textbook? There's a need to cut the clutter of civics, not pretend that it's rocket science. In contributing to this Reader, my Projections motto: Tomorrows' Civics Today!⁶

"My music wants to transcend taste, it doesn't want to have a face, it doesn't want to be culture", says the Angolan writer Ondjaki, through one of his stories. IT DOESN'T WANT TO BE CULTURE! What does our civics want to be, or is it a sorry case of nothing wants to be civics enough? ■

There is a need to cut the clutter of civics, not pretend that it's rocket science. My Projections motto: Tomorrows' Civics Today!

Notes

- 1 Neoteny is an evolutionary trend in which humans extend their juvenile life, and thus promote their childlike curiosities, by ignoring the formal, restricting codes of a responsible adulthood geared for Darwinian survival.
- 2 The three branches of logic involve induction, deduction and abduction. Deduction works in the sciences, where truths are discovered based only on what is known. Induction helps to create assumptions and predictions. Abduction allows one to reverse the harsh arrow of logic and escape into hypothesising, and thus fantasy. These three work in synergy during any thought process.
- 3 Civics as a discipline is often overlooked as being within political sciences. That might explain this discrepancy.
- 4 This crank and desperate solution borrows from the literary character of Haliwa created by Israeli Arab writer Sayed Kashua in his short story "Cinderella".
- 5 Parapolitics (Raghavan Iyer) is the method of reflexively thinking about the frontiers of politics.
- 6 The apostrophe is intentionally placed to account for infinite tomorrows.

REPRESENTATIONS OF SOVEREIGNTY AT THE BOUNDARIES

AN ODE TO ELINOR OSTROM

Anitha Suseelan + Rajeev Kathpalia

Is illegibility a deliberate strategy of communities at the boundaries, a niche paradoxically defined by the homogeneity of a shared survival strategy and by a deliberate, hidden collective identity of marginal economic and political make-up? Challenging the fixed boundaries of area studies, this paper directs attention to a border locale of multiple, distinct geographies of land types, political inhibitions and social boundaries. These invisible borderlands are characterised by historic isolation. The schema of this narrative is built on the micro details of symbolic gestures in three cases ranging from physical structures to notional agreements. The significance of borderland studies, not area studies, takes its cue from the Dutch social scientist Willem van Schendel and from James C. Scott's seminal Zomia study.

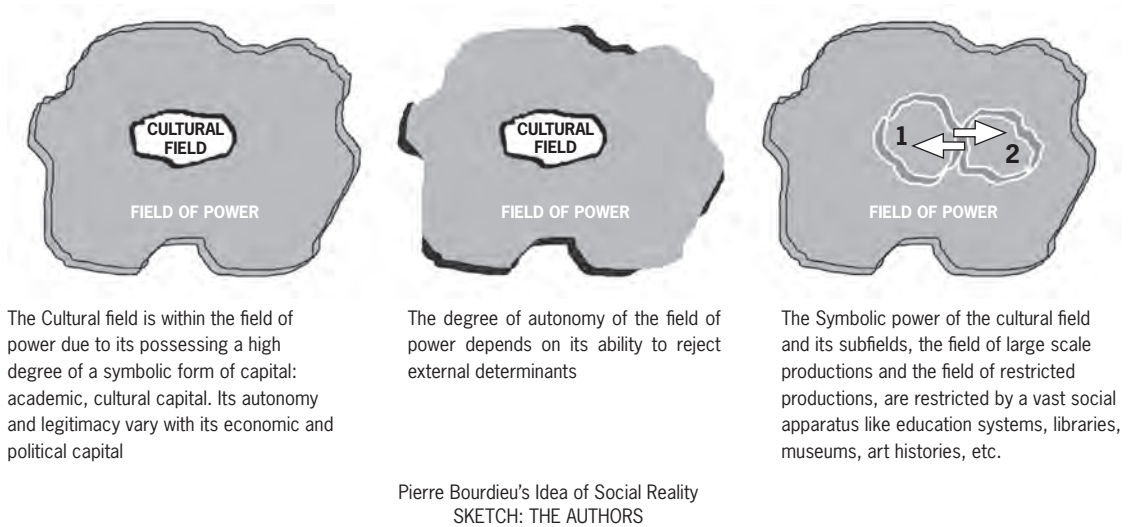
The paper asserts that these symbols of sovereignty are critical to the production of an inclusive locality. It compels us to see much that we would casually walk past, that we might

never taste, that we cannot include, that we do not know of. It is also assumed that such responses are more sensitive at the boundaries of two territories, in the contested terrain that could vary in scale from national administrative boundaries to the fence of a house. The idea of common properties is deconstructed through three cases, each radically different when viewed from within limited perspectives and assumptions, and is made to run to a logical conclusion.

The Confluence: A Sketch

The transcripts of these symbolic gestures are mounted critically on a sketch of the confluence of two theoretical concerns in cultural production and social organisation, those of Pierre Bourdieu and Elinor Ostrom.

Ostrom in her studies on commons exaggerates the entropy of common-pool/property resources (CPRs) to effect a high degree of self-organisation and self-governance as the individuals involved would be strongly motivated to try to



solve common problems to enhance their own productivity. The individuals operate through a binding contract to commit themselves to a cooperative strategy that they themselves work out; additional moves must be overtly included in the game structure, if within a non-cooperative framework.

Common property is widely recognised as a physical entity – a plot of land, a body of water, a forest – and as bounded within geographic space. Vijayendra Rao, in arguing towards his social theory, claims that common property could also be socially defined within symbolic space. The CPR settings enquired in this study are limited to situations where substantial scarcity exists, to communities created spontaneously due to an exogenous event of famine, poverty, lack of governance, extremities of hydrogeological situations, etc. The survival strategies for sovereignty here are as a result of a set of endogenous decisions, rallying the marginalised into a cohesive and dense network, rather than the survival of the fittest.

The principle cases that have aided the study to deconstruct the idea of common properties – the long-enduring, self-organised and self-governed CPRs – to understand sovereignty at the boundaries are: water harvesting structures in terrains of hydrogeological extremes (the *suranga* structures of the South Karnataka-North Kerala border); social organisations within the walls of political inhibition (the vertical slums in Kowloon Walled City); and food sovereignty at the boundaries of the social landscape, which have been either managed over extended periods of time or otherwise.

The Three Cases

CASE 1: *Suranga water harvesting structures in the Western Ghats*¹

Beyond an effort to map the region historically at the intersection of various administrative boundaries in time,

Below: *Suranga* under Construction
 PHOTO: SHREE PADRE

Bottom: Collection Mud Tanks
 PHOTO: AUTHORS



Case 1 illustrates an evolution within the environmental extremes of the hills and an oligarchy of the commons, defined largely by migrating brahmin communities and the local Byari Muslims.

THE FIELD AND THE HABITUS: The silent cultural geography of the highlands of the Western Ghats, with the study area specifically between the rivers Netravati and Payaswini, is typically invisible as it lacks any historical textual sources in its own language, deriving these instead from neighbouring societies. The heritage and cultural production of this region of study cannot be simply explained by observed local political and cultural influences, but requires a macro stance to understand the immigrated populations and the local settlers over the centuries. Natural calamities and multiple religious, political and economic interactions, both adjacent and distant, have accelerated the making of this new, invisible, social and geographical sovereign space.

A peep into Bantwal town – in the 18th century, a flourishing trade outpost of the Province of Canara – illustrates the highland/lowland binary that existed.² Bantwal, with its formal settlement pattern on the banks of the River Netravati, had a population predominantly composed of trading communities, principally the local Byari Muslim



The Growth of KWC, Hong Kong
 SOURCE: CITY OF DARKNESS

converts, with Arab trade links going back to the 7th century, and the immigrant brahmin population, the Gaud Saraswathis and the Karads.

Life in the town fluctuated with the floods of the Netravati, but in 1923, devastating floods forced people to move to the wastelands in the surrounding highlands, where they redefined sovereignty with less interference from the state, and evolved new, silent geographies. We find an economics removed from political constraints, contrasting with the strong kinship of the neighbouring provinces of Coorg and Mysore, the brahmin oligarchy and the Marxist revolts of the west coast.

The geological characteristics of the region and its limitations are largely defined by high surface runoff during the monsoon and by the hard surface of its steep, laterite terrain. Residual deposits on the laterite, which fails to retain sufficient water during the rains, and the lithomarge clay zone sandwiched between the laterite and the underlying weathered rocks made wells an expensive, energy-intensive alternative.

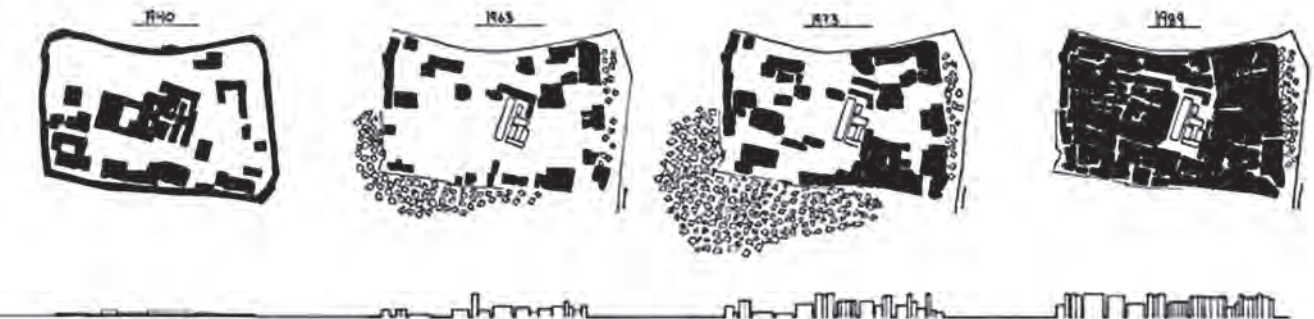
Such a political and natural ambience resulted in a struggle to survive and resist, altering production strategies as well as the inhabitants' perceptions of the environment in order to improve their control over the utilisation of natural

resources. *Suranga*, the symbolic good, involves much more than the physical act of accessing water.

It structured and modulated the morphology of the settlement, the cultivated terraces and homesteads clinging to the hills, confined to an altitude less than 600m above sea level, thus creating a vertical confluence of underground water on the barren hills. This vertical cascade, organised within a micro catchment, systemised the harvesting, storing, distributing and utilising of ground water in a sustainable manner and redefined land uses and land tenures. The vernacular irrigation technique evolved and challenged traditional collective water harvesting structures into giving way to unit-level ownership for a collective cause. It resorted to a collective knowledge-sharing as it motivated the community to enhance individual productivity and survival.

CASE 2: Kowloon Walled City, Hong Kong – the Walls of Political Inhibition

Kowloon Walled City was a labyrinth located at the contested border of China and the British colony of Hong Kong, and was completely demolished and removed by 1992. Conceived as a watch post of surveillance against the attacks of pirates, it was completely taken over by squatters on the surrender



of Japan after the Second World War. Hong Kong remained a British colony, and the new border drew new terrains of political inhibition, which both Britain and China refrained from governing. This political ambience made it the perfect breeding ground for a stateless city with apparent chaos, vices and an anarchist society. As a Communist government gained control over China, refugees fleeing south to escape famine, civil war and political persecution turned it into an asylum of brothels and opium and gambling dens, recording a population density of 13,000p/ha.

THE FIELD AND THE HABITUS: Within the walls of political inhibitions, in the City of Darkness flourished an elusive true community, a labyrinth of new spaces of production, with multiple layers of activities simultaneously overlaid, rendered with an apparent lack of organisation but with a tenuous structure of survival tactics. The constant appropriations to the physical built structure resulted in a vertical sprawl.

Resources were used in an exhaustive manner with additions layered over layer, resulting in a physical growth which never renewed itself, but only added and integrated to a vertical sprawl. These spaces of production, with their very low investment and running costs, made high demands on health and safety, which were never a concern in the strategies

of survival. It allowed the sustenance of many, and hence the life span is apparently less, but the space served for a population density which was equivalent to or maybe higher than that of a model which would have sustained a longer life. The per capita production of such multi-layered spaces is very high, and hence the yield, which is in inverse relation to the life span. The unregulated integrated entropy may result in morphological disaster, or social or political irrelevance.

The Vertical Sprawl of KWC, Hong Kong
TERASAWA HITOMI IN *DAIZUKAN KYURYUJYOU*



The hyper-dense KWC
SOURCE: *CITY OF DARKNESS*

CASE 3: Food Sovereignty

The Case on Food Sovereignty signifies the notion of food as a social entity beyond a material. Farhad Mazhar's research on communities in the dry lands of the Deccan and the flood plains of Bangladesh enquires into the role of uncultivated foods in the food systems of the poor. It negates the romantic notion that traditional community institutions are always equitable, that traditional agriculture is able to adjust rapidly to changing circumstances, and the deterministic notion that the poor can only be rescued from their plight by the technology of corporate agriculture.

THE FIELD AND THE HABITUS: The uncultivated biodiversity in South Asia is significant in village pastures, village ponds, community forests, rivers, backwaters, waste lands, along pathways, fences, etc. There also exists a hidden customary right which allows the poor to claim these ecological productions. Rural people collect medicinal plants in common and private spaces to address health problems, use crop residues to feed their animals, exchange services with trades people and craftspeople in the community, collect produce foraged from uncultivated lands and forests, collect fish in open- and closed-access water bodies, collect food while weeding crops for neighbours, and so on. The plants may be greens, which are cooked for human consumption, or grass for cattle consumption. The binary between cultivated and uncultivated food draws this enquiry to new boundaries of value spaces critical for livelihood and nutrition.

The customary right of the poor to collect food from their surroundings carves distinct sovereign landscape fragments in the process of their survival strategies. The case highlights these fragments beyond simply a spatial entity but as fragments rendered complex by ecological dynamics and deliberately illegible ethical relations. Food is thus perceived as an entity beyond a material, and as independent of those social relations that define where and how it is produced and consumed.

The Hidden Transcripts

These silent terrains do not hold a centralised homogenous system, but fragmented social divisions, a shatter zone to which people take resort in the process of a shared survival strategy. These fragments provoke or unsettle the existing paradigms of environmental surges or extremes, political inhibitions and economic disparities to draft new transcripts of exchanges beyond just a way to produce and distribute energy and materials. These new transcripts serve as repositories of collective identity but are rendered illegible by dispensing with the written arts in favour of oral traditions, by practices largely signalled by collective pragmatic goals and by unwritten ethical agreements and customary rights, resulting in new social landscapes.

Conclusion: Fields and Habitus, an Overview

The field and habitus narrative of the three cases paints sovereign spaces that are not just physically marked, but assume sovereign models of innovation. The first two cases are individually run and regulated parts of individual practices which integrate or add up to a larger spatial practice collectively agreed upon. All three are rendered complex by ethical relations and ecological dynamics, which are largely self-governed within distinct dichotomies.

- a. **The Defined Boundaries:** The fundamental similarity among the CPR settings described in the paper is that they all face uncertain and complex environments, situations where substantial scarcity exists, unlike the abundances of the adjoining provinces. This essentially defined the notional boundaries of their settings and the appropriators, the first initiative in organising for collective action. In Case 1, the hydrogeological limitation is a major source of uncertainty. The construction or the solution of the *suranga* tends to reduce the level of uncertainty and increase the level of complexity. Irrigators must have practical engineering

skills as well as farming skills. Prudent long-term self-interest reinforces the acceptance of the norms of proper behaviour. In Case 2, resource is to have access to owning a unit and to have a livelihood in it. The untaxed, uncounted and un-tormented by governments defined the boundaries for entrants. In Case 3, social or ethical relations to the poor define the social boundaries.

None of these situations involve participants who vary greatly in regard to ownership of assets, skills, knowledge variables, or others that could strongly divide a group of individuals. Ethnicity, race and other differences are always less represented. This congruence of social make-up further defined the social boundaries of these landscapes. In Case 1, a Marxist and traditional oligarchic political ambience within the region eased out the constraints of hierarchical order, resulting in a defined community setting with the collective strategy to fight hydrogeological extremities. The system worked by involving the local Byari Muslim community, which had the knowledge base to work with the difficult terrain, and the brahmin community with its knowledge of farming skills. Cases 2 and 3 are defined or represented by communities that are economically deprived, and strategies evolving inclusive closed communities are as a result of the survival tactics of a community accommodated or tolerated by the larger communities on an ethical relationship.

- b. The Congruence of Appropriation Rules and Local Conditions:** The specific operational rules varied with the attributes of the related physical systems, cultural worldviews and the economic and political ambience that exist in the settings. The appropriation rules restricting time, place, technology and/or quantity of resource units are related to local conditions and to provision rules requiring labour, materials and/or money. Within specific rules, the opportunistic behaviour of the participants also varied.

Appropriation, provision, monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolution and governance activities: a self-monitored or quasi-voluntary compliance is generated in these self-evolved settings. Strategic actors are willing to comply in these involuntary surveillance systems – the presence of the first actor deters the second from an early start, and the presence of the second user deters the first from a late ending. In the first two cases, individual practices integrate or add up to a larger spatial practice, collectively agreed upon.

- c. Nested Enterprises:** As the system grows, it fluctuates social and physical equilibriums and tends to new or nested organisations. It bifurcates and forms new additions and/or will face a slow death in the process. With minimal recognition of rights to organise, as theorised by Elinor Ostrom in her seminal work on commons, it is important that the rights of appropriators to devise their own institutions are not challenged by external government authorities, new tenure systems, the advancement of technology, newer aspirations of the appropriators and the transition to an open access status of these silent communities.

The common properties generated, both physical and symbolic, are susceptible to high levels of transformation and are born out of survival tactics that resonate with ethical relations. The integration of the hidden entropy tends to a stable or unstable cumulative, and its sustenance depends on strategies of survival or resistance in the process to improve their control over the utilisation of resources. ■

Notes

1. Anitha Suseelan. "Investigating the Relation of a Sustainable Vernacular Technique to the Settlement Pattern". In (eds.) Jan Feyen, Kelly Shannon and Matthew Neville, *Water and Urban Development Paradigms: Towards an Integration of Engineering Design and Management Approaches* (CRC-Taylor and Francis Group, 2009, London) pp. 473-78. Surangas are horizontal tunnels or water structures dug into the laterite hillocks of South Karnataka and North Kerala to tap underground water. This is practiced at the level of the individual dwelling, unlike the community water structures traditionally found in agrarian communities. This system of water harvesting has evolved out of a unique relationship of living and farming within the settlement, farming on what was once declared wasteland, due to the lack of environmental awareness of the region.

The suranga is a perennial water-harvesting structure of average size 2'6"x6'0", cut across layers of laterite, ranging from three to 300m in length. Its construction is generally shared by family members at the rate of a metre a day up to the first 40m. From here onwards, the speed of construction is halved, as more time is required to remove debris. Beyond 100m, the pace slows even further, to a foot a day, because of low oxygen availability.

The locals here have developed unique tools to effectively drill these tunnels manually. The water is then stored in mud tanks at different levels. Airshafts are included in surangas that are over 100m in length to maintain air pressure in the tunnels. Branches may divert from the main suranga tunnel to better yield points or to avoid an obstruction in the course of construction. General house typology also responds to this new rhythm.

2. John and Charles Walker. **Gazetteer of Southern India: With the Tenasserim Provinces and Singapore** (Pharoah & Co., 1855, Madras). Bantwal, described as the largest taluk prior to 1852, comprised North Canara, Udupi, Mangalore, Puthur and Kasargode. The town benefited from its location en-route the trade link from Canara to Mysore, and it evolved as a trade centre for Mysore produce and for the coffee trade during colonial times.

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THE PROGNOSIS MONKEY

Kavya Murthy

I am a pine caterpillar in a procession going home. I am a tightrope-dancing, silken trail-weaving, sensorially deficient creature, moving in utmost darkness in a caravan, in a beeline, towards food, or sleep. Who leads me home and who it is I walk behind are a feature of random probability, a probability that does not offer an infinity of options, contingent on the whim of the arbitrary leader. I follow, but I also lead by the same double capture of arbitrary (mis)fortune, the silken path I lay out a vagary, a free will determining the motions of my caravan. I am the conceptual persona of the Idiot, I slow down the entomologist, I slow down Darwin's worms.

Jean-Henri Fabre was an entomologist in the 19th century. About him, and his ontological affinities with insects, much has been said, and a lot more can always be said. Take for example the pine caterpillars in his greenhouse, sheep-like in their everyday march home in processions, and called the pine processionaries. Fabre spent five days with his caterpillars in a greenhouse, wanting desperately to understand whether the caterpillars would realise, if he made them walk in circular processions, that they were walking in circular processions. He drew the pine caterpillars into a relentless circular trap – and with no olfactory or ocular capabilities worth speaking of, Fabre and his hand-drawn circumference disrupted the march of the leader of the procession. It was an unregistered disruption in which the circle itself led the procession, the leader without a clue about leading the procession in circles. Was the leader of the procession leading if the path was circular? Not a single caterpillar seemed to be able to fall out of the circle to weave a new path home, and no caterpillar responded to the fact of walking the same relentless path. Random chance in the procession, a break in the silken trail allowing for a potentially new direction, produced no revolution. Fabre watched the caterpillars with their machine-like sentience marching head to stern, day after day – shrinking up in devastated cold heaps with the fog and cold, or loping vaguely and hopefully for food, walking the road already travelled, a merciless path of no end, without a sense, a sensation, a consciousness, of the reason for their hunger and physical misery. Perhaps one caterpillar would stop and wonder. But not one stopped to explore. It is an enchanted circle, says Fabre, though with great frustration. A circle constituted by the hand of an entomologist possessed by curiosity, but with no break, no fracture, in the endlessness of the circumference. I spent several days, like the caterpillars, moving in circles with this text – would a renegade caterpillar, a revolutionary caterpillar, escape Fabre's trap and would the circle be broken?

Quite long ago now, Thomas Nagel told us that we could essentially never *know* what it is like to be a bat. What he said led us in two directions – one that tells us that there is an ontological essence to the experience of a bat being a bat, and one of a conceptual scheme that could allow us to *know*, or represent, or simulate, a bat-being.

A friend, and wonderful ecologist I have long admired, once wrote about elephants that visited her land. She spent days near them, communicating. A difficult communication, wrought with the tension of two beings encroaching into each others' boundaries of being.

The image of her near a majestic elephant, either silent or calling out loudly, a friendly voice to an elephant on the run from forest officials and unfriendly voices, stayed with me. What stayed was that the elephants, and her, did not suddenly come together in a bond, and neither was a friendship born. They stayed almost exactly where they were. She could only go so close, in perfect distance and perfect touch. The way it sometimes is with something you seek to understand.

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I spent a significant amount of my 17th year following a particular species of monkey in the wilderness – the bonnet macaque, the *macaca radiata*, an Old World Monkey. This old encounter is now coming together in my mind in a different landscape of ideas, encountered through the years while witnessing, working with and inspired by ecologists in the wilderness. Several hours of days studying the social behaviour of bonnet macaques were spent with two troops of monkeys. In order to have animals be legible to me in their 'social' formation, I needed to visibly identify the male from the female, the adult from the juvenile, the juvenile from the infant, and begin to create a shorthand of recognition for each monkey – the choice of a name or the choice of a number. This long process of association was to me not only an intimate understanding of the everyday journeys of these monkey troops, but also an understanding of the behavioural distinctness of each animal from another. In order to know the number of monkeys in each troop, I needed to identify each monkey as distinct from another. In order to then distinguish each troop from another, I needed to know the everyday territorial journeys they undertook for foraging, playing and resting.

There were two encounters with individual monkeys whose memory never left my mind.

On more than one occasion, I encountered the alpha male of one of the troops on a small path built across a bund. With a pond on one side and a set of rocks on the other, the path was the only way across the bund. I would walk from one side, while the alpha male walked from the other. Our paths confronted each other, demanding of one another a making way: who would go first? On each occasion I saw this monkey across the bund, I would wish for the chance to meet him there every day, to see if we could pose this challenge of power each time: me a female human primate, him an Old World alpha male. What were we gauging when we held each other's gazes? My proto-feminist interpretations clashing with his primordial and banal need to get going? The challenge in my gaze mirroring his? His gaze a simpler, non-challenging one, misunderstood by me?

In contrast to this alpha male was Longshanks, the second-in-line male monkey of the troop, from my calculations, whose size and build indicated his potential for being next in line as head of the troop. I met him along the same path too, in the same situation, where he moved aside – and let me go first. In my fervour to explain the behaviour of the alpha male, I had come to the conclusion, then, that the alpha male made way for no female. The second-in-line monkey, my favourite of the troop, I explained as a non-aspirational, gentle creature, a different sort of gentlemen.

On another occasion, I had seen a female monkey hold the dead body of her infant in her arms as she foraged, rested and moved from place to place. I followed her for a total of three days, noticing the smell of the decomposing body grow rank, but the female monkey unrelenting in her embrace of the dead infant. I spotted her on two occasions grooming the dead infant, despite the fact that the body of the infant was fast decomposing. I lost track of this troop, however, and do not know what happened next. But I learnt from my teacher, who studied animal behaviour herself, that this kind of 'maternal attachment' had been noted and studied in females of monkey troops.

This connaissance in the context of environmental science drew its concerns from deep ecology, the backbone of our discursive structure. We studied the world of the non-human

to expand our sense of the human place in the world, to displace the place value of human beings in the scheme of things. Raging as we were against ideas of dams destroying livelihood and land, cities infringing on forests, and so on, our environmental studies projects entailed the gathering of data about the natural world. This knowledge would substantiate a political ecology that could explain the place of the 'natural', create a knowledge of it in order to think through what living in coexistence would mean. But what we could not escape was the social in us that bore down so strongly on what we saw, what we touched, what we encountered.

And since then, I have for a while been in conversation with myself and others about what a politics of ecology means. A lot of my thoughts of the past few months have ranged from what I could call an evangelising circus – a wedding of ecology and theology (Latour 2009) – to a radical embracing of the end of the world, in trying to model the life of a being, a plant, a fungus, a caterpillar, something alive and sentient but whose time in the world I could merely proximate in representation. The task I set myself was in the context of thinking of vast ecological degradation and the rapid deterioration of the natural world set in motion by human activity. But rather than an attempt to chronicle the possibilities of salvation for human and non-humankind, and record the methods and practices we could hope to work with to effect a change in the way things proceed, in the context of industrial, capitalist modes of social formation, etc., I set myself the agenda of how one could theorise, conceptualise and think of the non-human in a time such as this. That the world as we know it is in danger and headed towards a slow death is something that I do not hope to lay out as an argument; taking this for granted, I asked myself, if we are headed towards a certain demise, how can we now think of the non-human world and our relationship as human beings in relation with it? The end of the world has captured much of our popular imagination; from cinema to literary science fiction, it has been a preoccupation that has allowed for an exploration of not only our responsibilities towards the world as we know it, but also of responses to our fear of our ultimate demise. Thinking of the world at large, and not just through the social, is a challenge that is now entering into scholarship, literature, art, cinema – in a sense, into our very beings as creatures on the planet.

My question a few months ago was an attempt to first work through a conceptual bat-being. If we cannot know what it is like to be a bat, or a range of other creatures of the natural world, and in the context of ecological degradation, could we ask this question instead: if the world exists despite our capacity to represent it, and if we are of that world, how do we think about the world as a *part of it*, and not only from the position of representationalism (Barad 2003:811)? The questions of what can we know and how can we know can get hopelessly conjoined to produce a direction that brings us back into a cave of delusions. But if we do not want to step back into the cave, what do we say?

I thought I would begin with Donna Haraway's idea of speculative fabulation: an "opening up what is yet-to-come in protean time's pasts, presents and futures" (Haraway 2012:4). The idea within this is that we can salvage in our languages a thinking of the world as we know it, and can know it, by an imaginary that re-envision the ever-changing relationships between ourselves and the non-human worlds. But I could not fetch far, in my imaginations, as I grappled with the idea of a planetary holocaust. My speculative beings did not gain ontological ground, nor did they salvage, speculatively, a fabulous imaginary. They were feeble feints, distractions that merely dug in the same soil of language and discourse. But I did not want to take a deep-ecological plunge without somehow sorting through the speculative grounds available to us in asking the question, how can the world matter to us anew, with the planetary holocaust in full view?

Is it not strange to think of the non-human world suddenly mattering to us, with an end suddenly in sight, *because* of that potentiality? A crisis that seems to produce a mixture of

things – from the ecologists' rage, proclaiming the geological endurance of other non-human formations that most of us *just do not see*, to an immediate call-to-action as ecological agents in a situation of cosmological death. It has even produced symbols of national integration with our disappearing tiger as a rallying point for our opportunity to be our *better selves* (accompanied by a plea from the deodorant-free Leonardo DiCaprio), and it produces images of great death and even sadder passion as dead whales wash ashore, polar bears clutch mournfully to lone ice-islands and, within the blink of an eye, four acres burn in the Amazon.

We are posited with a problem that Latour has characterised as a dilemma between the need to modernise and the need to ecologise (Latour 1993). Referencing the modern, I wonder, is this a sort of *young* problem, of the last few centuries now trickling into the 21st? Surely it is not a problem stretching backwards for thousands of years, but a problem unique to our creation of it in the last centuries, a small geological stratum in time? And who is us and how do we locate the us? And if we are confronted with a 20/1st/th century problem, will we have then to look at time differently? The time of the whale in *Moby Dick* is surely not the time of whales washing ashore because of internal haemorrhaging caused by oil drilling? What makes this urgency towards the non-human world so very urgent, and different?

•••••

And how do you think again of your place in the world, if the earth is, as an archaeologist claimed, Medea and not a resilient Gaia? A Medea indifferent to our political mourning or our actions, who will also actively seek the demise of this place, this planet, in her murderous embrace. Does that mean that EarthMedea will also have a *deus-ex-machina*? Or is the earth as Medea a sense of life, seeking its own demise, in different circles of time? And in that set of currents, is the human species an agential mechanism in rendering another round of extinctions, Medea's right hand as she slays her children? If this is the case, what kind of agential possibility can we redeem in another direction? Or can we, even?

•••••••

But having spent a considerable amount of time thinking about the end of the world with a book called *Endgame* that calls for the destruction of industrial civilisation as my bed time conscience-keeper, I have been asking another question, of what game to play with the End – if we are running a final race to the finish, in which a leap of faith, a change in strategy, will help us complete the race, or arrive at the final destination. Or if we could imagine a different kind of game: not of running very fast, but of running to *slow down* (Stengers 2005) – to let other beings catch up, and to realise that slow as they are, they will not catch up, and it is all entirely about *our* slowing down.

But to slow down is not to call for a return to nature or to commune with silent trees (as fond as one can be of doing so). If one takes the starting premise to be that the human, the social, and language are finite and perishable, and that the entropy of the natural world and the irreversibility of ecosystem degradation are still to be comprehended as they are, materially, ontologically, ethically, what sort of propositions does this incomprehension allow us to make, without the view of finding an answer, but asking what grounds can we stand on?

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What if we are interested not in what it is like to be Nagel's bat, but to ask what the bat *can* be? To us, in value, and to itself, in value. If we do not ask this question as a value-realist project to reaffirm the cosmic value of beings and the need to preserve them, as is often the case with deep ecology, we could come back to the palpable sense that there is a world that exists, despite our ability, or capacity, to represent it. That that world exists, in terms and languages we can encounter, conjecture upon, seek to know – but independent of our desires to make, create, think with, along with and about that world. One could ask what then is this value, and if there is no speaking for another, what speaks? The question is that

if the other does not speak, or is indifferent to what we say, what might we say or how do we speak for something whose value we cannot ontologically ascribe or comprehend? Donna Haraway in *Where Species Meet* recalls the discussion of wounds to the primary narcissism of the self-centred human subject – the Copernican, the Freudian and the Darwinian – that displace human exceptionalism, creating ruptures in our knowledge to expand to dimensions outside the realm of human knowledge of self and other. The attempt to salvage a non-anthropomorphic subject, displace the self-centred human subject by different arrangements in epistemological jigsaw puzzles, describes to me the fundamental inability we possess – and I say this without a moral arraignment of it – of being able to hold back our words and language, utter not a word and try to commune with an elephant. We are, after all, bipedal hominids obsessed with speech, our two legs mostly supporting the weight of semantics.

.....

And nor can we simply create another Ultimate Other – species beings and geological strata (Haraway 2008) – to save, as we think of the ecological destruction of our planet, if we do want to step out of our anthropocentric narcissism. But if we already effect the (political) ecological shift into secular semantics in agreeing that we are beings which exist not in singularity but in intra-active becomings with other processes, and *are* phenomena, how much can our finite, perishable and entropic languages allow us to really imagine a present with those becomings?

.....

The idea with intra-action in the philosophy of sciences, as a response to our political ecological dilemmas, is to suggest not a causality in action of us as human beings *towards other beings*, but an interlinkage, an assemblage and cross-fertilisation of becomings. To think laterally with the idea of ecology is an important speculative proposal that has been in the making with an increasing growth of science studies and farfetchings,¹ which imagine that there is an infection between and among species, decentring the idea of a narrative of a single species as cause or effect. As Karen Barad suggests, the post-Bohr² moment in science that places the assemblage or the positioning of our propositions at the heart of our emerging generalisations (to cross-fertilise between Stengers and Barad), is a fundamental *onto-epistemological break* – one that does not confine the emergence of a proposition to merely an ontological feature of the thingness of the thing described nor a mere representatative emergence of a theory in epistemology. It is not just a break from epistemological realism merely in decentring the Cartesian model of subject and object.³ However, the idea of salvation for the human race is itself an enormous challenge that cannot be undermined; thinking about the non-human, whether intra-actively or through an actor-network theory, would somehow keep deferring the question. As Isabelle Stengers suggests, to those who have effected this political ecological shift, how do we gather around a common cause to think together about being agents in a situation of enormous ecological destruction?

.....

- ⋈ Let us assume we have made the break between subject and object, and that we create an in-adequation between subject and object.
- ⋈ Let us assume that there is no secure foundation for knowledge, and remember the limits of what we know.
- ⋈ Let us remember that all we have are vitality and assemblages.
- ⋈ Let us, if disinterested, like with Stengers, in the question of a Kantian cosmopolitanism, concede that the ontology of objects is distinct from our knowledge of them.

But then how shall we proceed, if what we are left with is a political ecology that is speaking on behalf of, and a taking up the point of view of, the experiential subject in order to explicate

the reality of beings heretofore unknown to us? The attempts at proximity within political ecology work by laying out the nature of things as they are in being (I am not merely a human conscious self, but living matter, bacteria that will live on even as my self dies). But, even if this is the case, how does one place the agential relationality of man to the high decibel sounds that cause internal haemorrhaging in the whale? How do we position the place of the whale in the phenomena of our discursive structures, and how far do we travel down what Nagel calls the phylogenetic tree of taxonomy (Nagel 1974) to mammals, to insects, to bacteria, to particles? Because, really, it is not a taxonomic journey at all.

A flat ontology necessitates an important break, to dismantle a vertical ontology that places the anthropomorphos at the centre, but does it dislodge the fundamental difficulty of knowing of that which is indifferent to our representation of it? It is the distance, and proximity, between the non-human and the human self in looking that asks for us to tell a story, about a consciousness, sentience or being that is in no way representable by us except within the range of our semantic and linguistic parameters. The question is no longer whether the thing spoken of is the thing itself or its multidimensional realities.

●●●●●●●●

If we speak to elephants, cats, caterpillars and bats, not to know but to communicate, what would we say? Can we imagine the work of political ecology to be an annulment of *nihil sine ratione*, whence the idea that we can reason towards a magnetic field that draws us as reason, as ideation, as cause, does not exist? If deep ecology derives from a fundamental hearing, listening and sense-awareness, then it not just a question of acting towards, but of acting *alongside*, and to think with, or be with. But it is, really, *our* world – individually, collectively as a species, interactively and intra-actively, our world to inhabit and stake a claim in. Let us jump off the ground of our propositions and solutions, not with the hope of surveying and understanding and knowing the whole landscape – but to jump to see the world differently, crying, as the ground and the sky and the bats are, for new dimensions. If our enquiry will not be to ask if the thing spoken of is the object at hand, and if we abandon the need to know, shall we call back to elephants as they are, walk like benighted caterpillars, and make way for Old World Monkeys as we walk down our silken, broken and ruptured ontological and epistemological pathways? ■

Notes

- 1 "The word 'farfetching' refers to the skill of arriving at intuitive perceptions of moral entreties. Using metaphors rather than rational symbols, farfetching offers a way to investigate and express new forms of ecological ethics". Available at: <http://udini.proquest.com/view/farfetchings-on-and-in-the-sf-mode-goid:807619532/> (last accessed 14 December 2012).
- 2 Karen Barad. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter". In **Signs** 28(3) *Gender and Science: New Issues*, pp. 801-831 (Spring 2003). "Neils Bohr's philosophy of physics rejects atomistic metaphysics that takes things as ontologically basic entities. For Bohr, things do not have inherently determinate meanings".
- 3 Levi R. Bryant. **The Democracy of Objects** (Open Humanities Press, 2011). Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.9750134.0001.001> (last accessed 10 August 2012).

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MG
sara READER
art as a place



18 August 2012 – 16 April 2013

Curated by Raqs Media Collective

PROPOSE AN OPEN STUDIO EXTEND ART
WRITING CREATE A PROCESS PRACTICE
RELAY PROCESSES IMAGINE AN
EXTENDED NETWORK PRACTICE
PRODUCE REPETITION WORKS SHAPE
INSTRUCTION WORKS CONCEIVE A SOAP
OPERA OCCASION A CRIME STORY
CONDUCT AN AUDITION PUT TOGETHER A
PHOTOGRAPHIC BILLBOARD REALISE A
SLIDESHOW COMPOSE A MIS-EN SCÈNE
FORMULATE A BROADSHEET

WORK 10AM-5PM OVER A WEEK, IN THE SPACE
CALL PEOPLE FOR LUNCH DISCUSSIONS IF YOU
WANT DEVELOP A CRITICAL LEXICON AND
VOCABULARY FOR CONTEMPORARY ART INVOLVE
MORE PEOPLE WORK BY YOURSELF INVOLVE
TOGETHER WITH OTHERS WRITE PERFORM
INITIATE CREATE PUNCTUATIONS PAIR MAKE A
SET PRODUCE A WORK NO SPECIFIC WORK
NEEDS BE MADE STAGE TRANSFORM SPACE
GIVE FORM TO AN IDEA QUESTION EXPLORE
RESPOND INVESTIGATE INVENT

The exhibition process will be punctuated through "episodes" – points of focus and interest that will open out across concentrated moments of public attention. Artists, researchers, scholars, curators, critics, filmmakers, writers, performers, dancers, musicians, magicians, activists, scientists, photographers, architects, poets, journalists, and more, are invited to make proposals that can be tested by, opened up to, and shared with the public.

Opens on: 18th August, 2012

Episode One: 13th October, 2012
Episode Two: 15th November, 2012

Episode Two: 15th December, 2012
Episode Three: 3rd February, 2013

Episode Three: 3rd February, 2013

The exhibition takes its name from the Sarai Reader book series, which

The exhibition takes its name from the Sarai Reader book series, which have been widely recognised as a site of critical and creative thinking. The making of the book 'Sarai Reader 09 (Projections)', will accompany the exhibition.

A collaboration between Devi Art Foundation, Gangtok, and Sora Centre for Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, with support from the Royal Norwegian Embassy, New Delhi.

ART AS A PLACE

© ASL Association 2012; 16 August 2012

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Rare Media Collective

SARAS READER: THE EXHIBITION IS A CO-PRODUCTION BETWEEN THE ART FOUNDATION, GORHAM, AND SARAS-CSDA, BRIT. SUPPORTED BY THE ROYAL NEPALESE EMBASSY, NEW DELHI AND HIMALAYAN RENAISSANCE ART FOUNDATION, VIENNA.

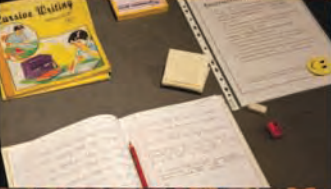
Date: 15-11-2012

From: Raqs Media Collective

Dear Artists@'Sarai Reader 09' (and all of you who have been following the process of the exhibition at Devi Art Foundation, Gurgaon), we are working on the proposition: **"Art as a Place"**. This concept has emerged from the experiences around SR09. It would be great if all of you could send your thoughts on this, as a paragraph or two, from your reading of the texture, rhythm, encounters, uncertainty and porosity of the place that you find in Devi.







Zuleikha Chaudhari, Artist and Theatre Director

A series of lines on various planes

They are in between the just after and just before

It is poetry it is speculation, fact, analysis, gesture

Still images in movement. Precisely particularly.

A thing which is also a depiction which is also an experience
which is also a place

The planes unfold re-dimension refold

This is a performance. It is in rehearsal.

The place is an event.

Jyoti Dhar, Art Critic

Art as a Place in which things take shape. I'm thinking about H.G. Master's recent article where he proposes that we reassess, in this case caricature-like, absurdist, painting, not as a window onto something, but rather a theatre of sorts.

Vijai Patchineelam, Artist

There is that essay by Perec about a room that is useless: "I have several times tried to think of an apartment in which there would be a useless room, absolutely and intentionally useless. It wouldn't be a junkroom, it wouldn't be an extra bedroom, or a corridor, or a cubby-hole, or a corner. It would be a functionless space. It would serve for nothing, relate to nothing". A space without a function. Not 'without any precise function', not pluri-functional, but a-functional. It wouldn't obviously be a space intended solely to 'release' the others (lumber-room, cupboard, hanging space, storage space, etc.) but a space that would serve no purpose at all.

Inder Salim, Performance Artist

I quote Freud, not to emphasise, but to see it as a leveller: "Wherever I go, I see poets (artists) have been before".

Gagandeep Singh, Artist and Telecommunication Entrepreneur

There was a call for tools, a need to know the corners, the surfaces, reflections, shadows, a sudden shift from forcible

encounters, an ease of pressure of movement, jerk-like shifting to working in the place which opened up like a crack. A process took over – of observing and watching this new place.

Naveen Mahantesh, Architect

We recently concluded a studio workshop at R.V. School of Architecture, Bangalore, and the theme was 'place-making'. A 'place' is for collective consumption, its intent is for the collective, within which an individual might *almost always* find an interpretation. There are other notions of time, residue, overlays and decay that add content to the 'place' and become part of the place-making process. These notions gave rise to the idea of 'context' being able to define a larger framework for a 'place' as opposed to a 'site'/'space'.

This was a very specific exercise, in architecture which tried to address the ideas of place making. There were many filters through which the idea of a place could be explored, and we explored it by "the death of the author". One, the immediate destruction of the notion of what the plan stood for, and two, the design process focussed on multiplicity and the temporal nature of the spaces designed. I haven't been to the Devi for the ongoing exhibition yet, but it will be interesting to look at an art gallery exhibition, minus its authors. Will it then read as a 'place'?



Inder Salim

Within the multiplicity of structures, mostly knotted by corporate time wasters, we emerge like uncultivated mushrooms after a creative cloud burst near the willow trunks of the city's drifting peripherals.

Anurag Sharma, Photographer

Place also entices one with possibilities to create with its abundance. An abundance reflected through the physicality of the place. At the same time, this can be an entrapment, with the whole fixation going towards exploiting this abundance. The abundance of an art place can supersede the creative process, which needs constant guarding/reflection.

Inder Salim

Play and leisure, intent and loitering, intensity and desire to connect are the first few steps to understanding the present. The idea of 'ritual' shifts radically from its conventional meaning and definition to something which touches our inner being, a being which is already loaded with accumulated pasts, both legible and illegible, both personal and political. We are all perhaps struggling to overcome our fears and connect with something trustworthy on the horizon. There is one more step, but we don't know if it's an abyss or a rose garden. We've never been there. These are 'processes', of encounters, of playfulness and randomness, of keys and locks we know not, of fabrics within fabric called us, and of silences forced upon us and silences we maintain. These are departures and arrivals at a place which transforms the space in such a way that we tend to have a fresh look every time we happen to occupy it again. We are then perhaps doing some Art.

Mihaela Brebenel, Research Scholar

The researcher opens a studio. No key need be fetched. It is an action over a place. Of enclosure and disclosure, encroaching and expansion. The part in participation. The natural light in the repository, the unfinished room, is a supplement.

Belinder Dhanoa, Artist and Teacher

A sensitivity to the body, its capacity for action, and its crucial role in perception, has remained a constant. It is a body that claims space in its stillness, displaces invisibility in its movement. I walk through Devi and find my place. On the mottled, grey cement I rest my feet, my frames, my thoughts, and I know the shared space. I see reflections and shadows of words on the floor, the walls, the mirror, my body. I see traces, reflections and the presence of others on the floor, the walls, the mirror, my body. I read, I interpret, I watch, I am inscribed, and I reach out to erase yet another word, another thought. Devi is a space in which I vanish, but I am Devi.

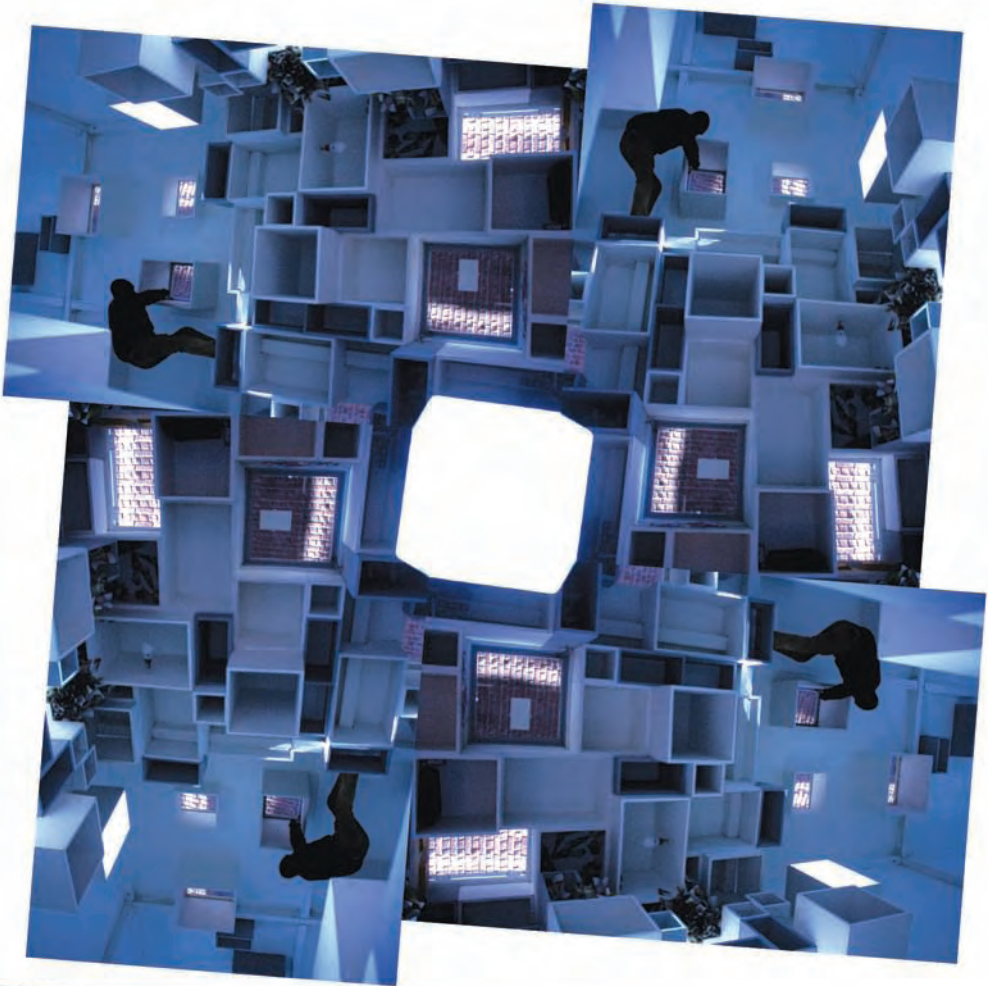
Inder Salim

Any lucid understanding of space is perhaps one which engages the 'naming' of the void in the first place. So, if the nothingness or zero or *shunyata* of the beginning is named as Zero or *Shunyatya* or Nothingness, we obviously get the idea of One, which is loaded with things that are made up of Zeros and Ones. And yet, we don't seem to penetrate the finite outline for any locomotion towards the infinite.

Gagandeep Singh

Inhabiting an animal forest amongst the structured layout cleared the air for a dialogue. I could walk freely, replicating the circles drawn earlier. This was only when the earlier cut-out forms from the past refused to find any grounds in this new place. This time, the struggle was between memory and the present moment. The net structure supported the animal forest, and I began a relation with the sensation of touch.












This place moves into our histories from the wilderness and the desert... or even from aboard ships that ply no more. I am speaking of *viharas* and monasteries and Foucault's heterotopic ship where people do things away from the central logics of imperial history. One speaks about places such as the Sufi *khanqah*. Away from the *polis*, away from the granaries of Mesopotamia, where too people gathered to do things but with objectives of building property and empires of control. One speaks maybe even of a village where much else is produced in distracted reverie of movements to come, what gets sold in the marketplace as tribal art or craft. Where the florid effervescence of life finds irrational yet aesthetically enchanting forms in leisure and ease. Something that has a parallel history even in the history of modern art parallel to the career of the bourgeois *salon*. Ruskin's Workingmen's College or Cooper Union as places where people came to exercise their skills and crafts. A place for those at variance with the logics of the factory and the marketplace as defined by their political economies to come to and practice a vision of the world in the reality of labour and history. The practitioners in such locales need not have been 'artists' as we understand the term today, not people professionally committed to a career in art. They consisted of all kinds of people – artists-to-be, journeymen, amateur dabblers in clay and paint and so on. Modernity promised the sublimation of creation in the wilderness of other times in a sublimely connected humanity.

One speaks of the place of non-art in the history of art just as the French philosopher François Laruelle speaks of the role of non-philosophy in the history of philosophy. One is now wondering of the bohemian contexts of 'sketches' of perceptual life, kitsch, amateur art, etc., at the fringes of modernity that nevertheless were foundational to the advent of modernist art. St John's Wood, Chelsea Village, Bandra-Versova and so on. Art



was for long and could acknowledge itself as a rhizomatic activity coursing through a myriad creative personalities – the artistic host, the muse, the model, the actress, the Sunday painter, the amateur sculptor or potter and so on. The ‘scene’ consisted of a few artists and many, many outliers of the majestic adventure of modern art. Today, unfortunately, we have a ‘scene’ defined only by artists/artists-to-be and a few others who are either monetarily- or media-worthy. There is too much art and very little else in the art scene today. One laments the demise not of communities (for art communities exist today as well) but of a certain connect the artist had with life. The place of art was one where art and the ordinary grew together through the passage of many kinds of life. There was a time when the art ‘scene’ could enrich and ennoble many kinds of lives other than the famously artistic ones. One also frowns at art’s self-willed sundering its relationship with that rather vague domain of experience and life – wisdom. Wisdom as a rule belongs to the terrain of emptiness, a space away from the logic of self-interest, in other lives or experiences. An art scene where everyone wants to be an artist in a professional competitive sense has very little occasion for such situations.

The erosion of leisure time, or rather the conversion of leisure into productive activity, is of course the principal reason why this has happened. It is the productivity of leisure-time activities that professionalises art in a certain way. And it is this same loss of leisure to productivity that impoverishes ordinary life, giving it unitary definitions – the place for many people doing many things in their lives and coming together to show off their wares to one another in easygoing ways is gone. As we know places (in the anthropological sense of the term) are disappearing into space, or are giving way to fantastic places of the imagination that are increasingly difficult to externalise, share materially or tangibly. What is really endangered by such a retreat of creation into the imaginary is the

space occupied by the human body. Frustrated by the lack of time to get out of continuous productivity, the mind demands that the individual destroy the very space of self-presence. Lacking place, the mind threatens to destroy space itself. The contradiction between unprecedented material creativity amongst populations and the regime of productivity that feeds off it are beginning to reach epic proportions.

The irony is that much of what passes for productive creative labour today is branded by the idea of communication. But the sense of communication that marks the production of things today in an era of relentless self-advertisement is that of the *Übermensch* in search of a flock to preach to. In some ways, the difference between the realms of art and the commercialised sectors of creative work that have grown so powerful after a century of feeding off art (much as art has grown through dialogue with all sectors of creative work) is precisely this: the retention at all costs – against the onslaught of the demand to become *Übermensch*, the preacher seeking the sect – of a place to create in duration, repose and communion with the world and life. Art becomes the last bastion of the struggle for meaningful leisure as opposed to the leisure imposed by regimes of productivity. But to do this, the place of art will have to let in the critical category of non-art, life itself, to seep into the spaces of artistic work. The point will not be to deny the frenetic pace of history, but to live amidst it, enjoy its hectic ways and visit the place of art to discuss life and experience in humane and easygoing ways. For that, artists will have to rediscover the place of non-art in their lives against the relentless call to professionalise in strict ways and join the factory-line (itself a conversion of agrarian harvesting lines) of productivity. Flights from empire into wilderness to find the place of art need to be sublimated in life itself... yet one more time.

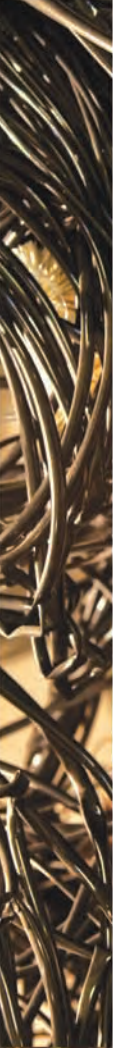
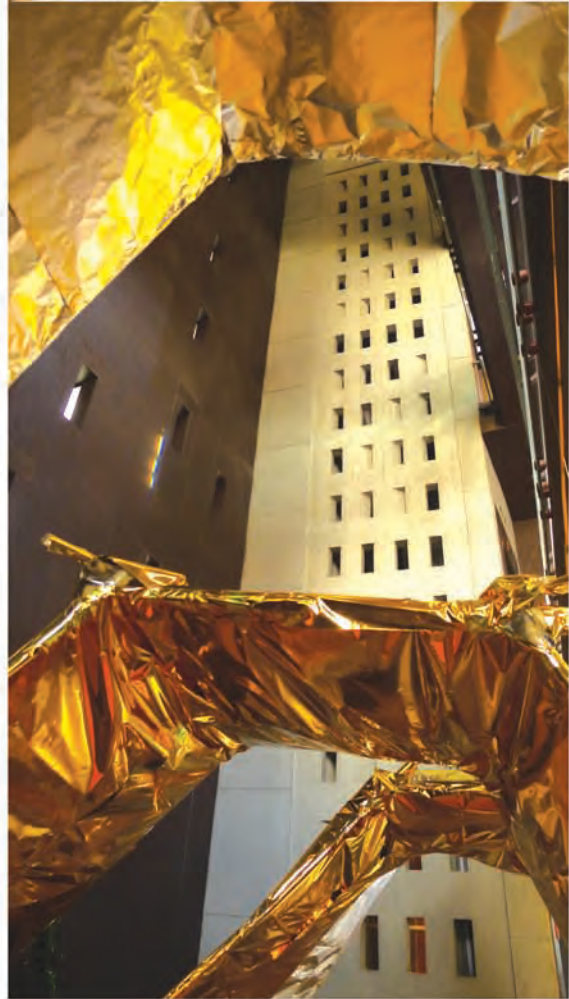
Kaushik Bhaumik, Historian



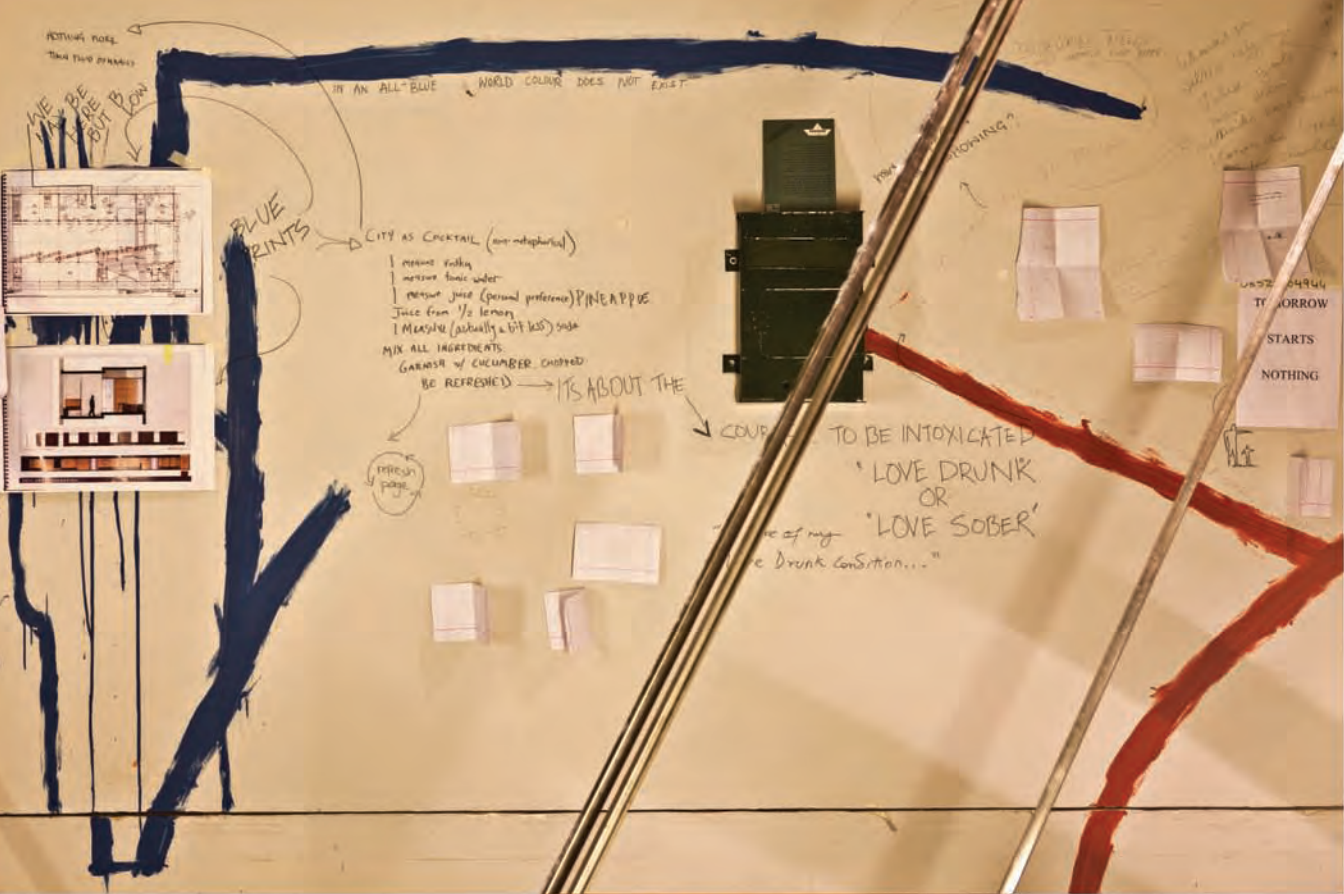


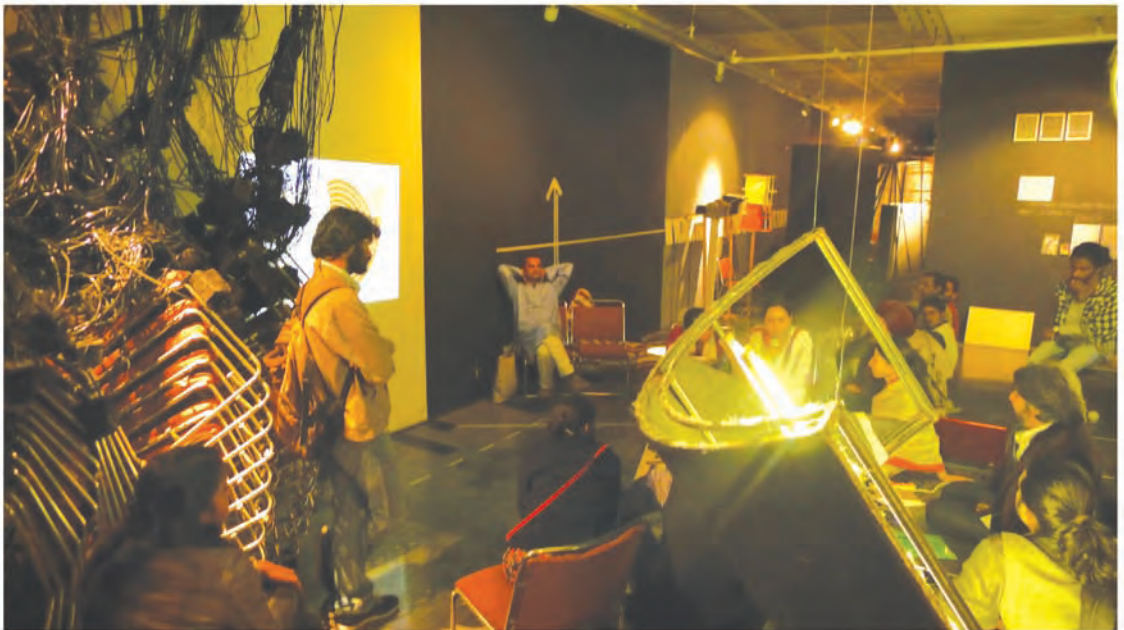
















Is the act of creating a glossary of micro-narratives an insurgent act? Gurgaon Glossary reiterates that cities get worked out beyond plans, conspiracies, policies, activisms, concepts, discourses and interventions. Many structured and unstructured conversations took place, about methods of engaging with the city, about exchanging notes with various people working on the city, and about sharing experiences of living in cities.

'Sarai Reader 09 Mumbai Extension: Gurgaon Glossary' by Rupali Gupte, Prasad Shetty and Prasad Khanolkar at Mumbai Art Room, Mumbai, February-March 2013.

LIANG • PORTSIDE • ASIM WAQIF, RAAKESH MPS, JULIEN SEGARD, ASHHAR FAROOQUI AND 9 CIRCUITS • RUPALI GUPTA, PRASAD

SHETTY AND PRASAD KHANOLKAR • SURAJ RAI • S. ANANTH • SOLOMON BENJAMIN • VIJAI PATCHINEELAM • RASHMI KALEKA • ANURAG

SHARMA AND ANUSH SINGH • SILKE KÄSTNER • ANITA DUBE • CYBERMOHALLA ENSEMBLE • ISHITA TIWARY • PARIBARTANA MOHANTY

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WALA AND KUSH BADHWAR • GAGANDEEP SINGH • MIHAELA BREBENEL • NIKOLAUS HIRSCH AND MICHEL MÜLLER • SUBODH KERKAR

AND KATHARINA KAKAR • TAPIO MAKELA • ISH S • ZULEIKHA CHAUDHARI • SHVETA SARDA • PARUL GUPTA • RABINDRA PATRA • NAMRATA

SINGH PANDIT AND UDAY PANDIT • PAYAL WADHWA AND NIRANJANI IYER • REHAAN ENGINEER • RUDRA RAKSHIT SHARAN • AMITESH

GROVER • MARIO SANTAMARIA • RANJEETA • ANVITA JAIN • ALEXANDER HAHN • UMANG BHATTACHARYYA • PARVEZ IMAM • JENSON

ANTO • MALINI KOCHUPILLAI AND JULIA GUTGE • S. VIJAYARAGHAVAN • SABA HASAN • INHERITANCE PROJECTS • AYESHA HAMEED •

MEERA MENEZES • KOUSTAV NAG • ELSKE ROSENFELD • AARTI SUNDER • AMARENDRA NANDI • SOUMITRIMAYEE PAITAL • SURESH

KUMAR G • PRAMOD KUMAR • MOHANAKRISHNAN HARIDASAN • YASHASWINI SR • PINAK BANIK • LIPIKA SINGH DARAI • PALLAVI PAUL

• NAVEEN MAHANTESH • SADRE ALAM • AKASH GAUR • AASTHA CHAUHAN • AISHA ABID • BOO CHAPPLE AND SANAZ MAZINANI •

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- **Raqs Media Collective** (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta) enjoys playing a plurality of roles, often appearing as artists, occasionally as curators, sometimes as philosophical *agent provocateurs*. They make contemporary art, curated exhibitions, edited books, staged events, collaborated with architects, computer programmers, writers and theatre directors. Raqs (pron. rux) follows its self-declared imperative of 'kinetic contemplation' to produce a trajectory that is restless in terms of the forms and methods that it deploys even as it achieves a consistency of speculative procedures. Raqs remains closely involved with the Sarai programme (www.sarai.net) at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi, an initiative they co-founded in 2000. <studio@raqsmediacollective.net>
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- **Ravi Vasudevan** works in the area of film and media history at Sarai/CSDS. His work on cinema explores issues in film, social history, politics, and contemporary media transformation. His current research tracks the way film use was dispersed from the site of the cinema into a variety of practical functions. He is also exploring the emergence of video technologies as part of a new Sarai project he is coordinating with Ravi Sundaram on media infrastructures and information. <raviv@sarai.net>

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Raqs Media Collective and Shveta Sarda

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